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Comments: Subject: Concerns Regarding Restrictions on New Climbing Routes and the Use of Fixed Anchors

Dear United States Forest Service,

I am reaching out to share deep concerns regarding the recent proposals impacting climbing activities, specifically relating to the establishment of new routes and the use of fixed anchors both in Wilderness and non-Wilderness lands.

Firstly, it is essential to address the critical role of fixed anchors in wilderness climbing areas. These anchors are integral to climbers' safety and have been a part of climbing practices for more than half a century. Their use aligns with the Wilderness Act, ensuring the safety of climbers while preserving the Wilderness character. The sudden shift towards prohibiting these anchors is not only unreasonable but also dismissive of the long-standing practices and safety norms within the climbing community. Such a prohibition would lead to safety hazards, impede necessary in-the-moment safety decisions, and potentially result in the loss of historic climbing routes.

Equally concerning is the proposal to restrict the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands. This approach is not only unenforceable but also likely to generate considerable confusion among both land managers and the climbing community. It's critical to understand that climbing is a dynamic sport, and climbers often discover and develop new routes. This evolution is fundamental to the sport and its community.

Moreover, a blanket restriction on the establishment of new anchors on non-Wilderness lands fails to consider the varied impacts of climbing across different areas. It is more prudent to maintain opportunities for new anchors while conducting analyses to determine if, and when, climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources. Such an approach would allow for a balanced consideration of both the preservation of resources and the interests of the climbing community.

In conclusion, I urge the United States Forest Service to reconsider the proposed restrictions on fixed anchors in Wilderness areas and the establishment of new climbing routes on non-Wilderness lands. These policies, as they stand, could significantly impede the safety, development, and legacy of climbing. A more nuanced approach, respecting the historical practices and the evolving nature of climbing, while diligently protecting our natural and cultural resources, is crucial.

Thank you for considering these points. I look forward to a policy approach that balances the preservation of our natural and cultural heritage with the legitimate interests and safety of the climbing community.

Sincerely,

John Hamm