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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear National Forest Staff,

I am a huge supporter of our national forests. They are the backbone of our country's natural beauty heritage. I thank you for all your hard work in ensuring these amazing places are available for both my enjoyment, and that of future generations. I am writing because I am concerned at recent proposed regulations regarding fixed hardware for climbers (rock, mountain, ice, etc). I am a conservationist first and foremost, and understand and support the instinct and intent to preserve the natural environment of The National Forests. However, I do feel that the proposed rules will undermine conservation efforts, as well as alienate and disenfranchise climbers, which are VERY supportive of conservation and low impact recreation. As a conservationist, environmentalist, hunter, passionate supporter of the National Forests, fellowship trained wilderness medicine physician, and volunteer search and rescue member, I think I have valuable perspective. Please hear me out as I share thoughts on these issues:

Fixed anchors are an essential piece of climbers' safety system and are not prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Following existing climbing policies that allow judicious use of fixed anchors for more than a half century will do more to protect Wilderness character while providing for primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing.

It is unreasonable for federal agencies to create new guidance policies prohibiting Wilderness climbing anchors across the country when they have allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades.

Prohibiting fixed anchors will create safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of fixed anchors, a responsibility undertaken by the climbing community. Critical safety decisions often must be made in the moment and any authorization process should not impede those decisions. Fixed anchor maintenance needs to be managed in a way that incentivizes safe anchor replacement and does not risk the removal of climbing routes.

Prohibiting fixed anchors obstructs appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Land managers need to allow climbers to explore Wilderness in a way that permits in-the-moment decisions that are necessary when navigating complex vertical terrain.

Prohibiting fixed anchors will threaten America's rich climbing legacy and could erase some of the world's greatest climbing achievements. Climbing management policy needs to protect existing routes from removal.

Restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will create confusion amongst land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

Climbing in this fashion has a built in traditionally low impact ethic. Climbers in wilderness are extremely mindful of ANY fixed hardware placement, and do not wish to indulge in ANY destruction of natural resources. We as a community are aligned with the vision of The National Forests, and collectively hope to be a part of decisions which affect our enjoyment of the forests' natural resources moving forward. I hope that you can see we are part of the solution moving forward.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ryan Kindervater