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Comments: For many years, I have been an advocate for wilderness protection. I have attended countless hearings and written dozen of letters - real hand written and typed letters to agencies and congressional representatives. I served on the River of No Return Wilderness Board, the main organization in Idaho that worked for the protection of the central Idaho Wilderness. I was involved in protecting the White Clouds, Gospel Hump and Hells Canyon. No one can say that I haven't done my share to help protect American wilderness.

But I find that the proposals being offered by both the Forest Service and Park Service to be way beyond what any of us who have been in the wilderness movement envisioned for the future. In that regard, I am completely against any rules which limit climbing anchors.

Here are my reasons:

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.

Moreover, 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.

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Sincerely,

Ron Watters