

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/3/2024 9:14:25 PM

First name: James

Last name: Olson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To the policy makers,

I am a 69 year old active climber who began that activity at the age of seven. I am, and have been a climbing guide primarily in the Tetons for 40 years.

I have been alerted to this controversy primarily by the Access Fund and am supposed to write comments against the implementation of the new policies prohibiting fixed anchors in wilderness areas.

But like most issues, the points to be made to resolve this debate are not clear cut on either side. That is, it's not a "black and white" issue.

Being against an anchor ban was a no brainer thirty or forty years ago. There were way fewer climbers then, and their impact was relatively minor. Today, the sheer numbers of climbers have changed the equation. They have more impact on the environment.

Not only have the numbers increased, but the backgrounds of these huge numbers of climbers are generally very different from what they were when I metamorphized into a climber.

Climbers back in my day were from the background of being backpackers, then scramblers, and then finally climbers.

Nowadays the demographic of the community of climbers is that they are mostly from urban areas, and a larger and larger proportion of them have very little outdoor experience or background. Many of them have only "gym climbing" in their resumes before they decide to go tackle a wilderness objective.

The other side of the coin is that if these new policies are implemented, keep in mind that climbers will still climb and still find it necessary to descend from their summits. This will entail leaving behind nylon slings, nuts, and maybe pitons or bolts, possibly placed covertly. The quality of these anchors will lessen compared to a well placed modern pair of bolts.

Many of these climbers have been poorly trained and instinctively seek to use rappelling as the vehicle of descent even when there are safer viable alternatives such as walking down a footpath. This category of climb should definitely not have any fixed anchors. However, there are many great climbs of which the only way down is to rappel utilizing anchors which must be left behind.

Conclusion:

There is no perfect solution. I would not like to see the anchors removed on existing historic classic climbs of which there is no alternative other than rappelling, to descend. Climbs of which one can walk off in order to descend should not have fixed permanent anchors. There was a time that I would have said that absolutely no restrictions on anchors should be tolerated. But for the reasons stated above, I could understand having a ban on any new anchors in wilderness areas.

But...there could be a compromise. The land managers could issue a limited number of permits for installing fixed anchors on a limited number of climbs per year including maintaining existing fixed anchors and the climbers themselves could have a Board to manage which projects go forward. It would be run by climbers so that the government agencies wouldn't be burdened with more bureaucracy. It would probably have to be policed to be enforced though. If that is too cumbersome then I'm afraid we should resort to a total ban on new fixed anchors because I feel "enough is enough!".....too many climbers are "clueless".....let wilderness be

wilderness!