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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To whom it may concern,

I am writing as a respected decade-long editor of the American Alpine Journal, which is renowned as the most comprehensive worldwide source of information on major new climbs and mountain exploration in the world, as well as a climber and wilderness advocate of 20+ years.

I have climbed extensively in many of the US' great Wilderness areas and National Forest Lands, from California's Joshua Tree National Park to Colorado's Black Canyon of the Gunnison to Wyoming's Cloud Peak Wilderness, and I have found the appropriate, long-standing use of fixed anchors in these locales to be an integral part of experiencing their utmost wildness, and found that they in no way do fixed anchors lessen or degrade the experience for any wilderness user.

The USFS' proposed changes to fixed anchor policy would be a major blow not only to the sport of climbing in America but also to the history of mountaineering on a global scale.

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.

Sincerely,
Erik Rieger