

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/4/2024 3:43:08 PM

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Comments: The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) released draft policies that would make fixed anchors (bolts, pitons, slings) prohibited in America's Wilderness areas. These policies would overturn nearly 60 years of sustainable Wilderness climbing precedent and impact some of America's most iconic climbs in Yosemite, Rocky Mountain National Park, Joshua Tree, Linville Gorge, the Wind Rivers, Sierra Nevada, and many others.

These new policies would classify fixed anchors as "prohibited installations" in Wilderness areas. This new classification would apply to both new and existing anchors-hindering Wilderness exploration, threatening the existence of longstanding established routes, and obstructing climbers' ability to replace old, unsafe bolts. This is a huge blow to climbers that not only threatens America's climbing legacy but puts the safety of our community at risk.

These NPS and USFS proposals come at the same time that legislation to protect the legal and conditional use, placement, and maintenance of bolts and other fixed anchors is making its way through Congress. The bipartisan Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act and America's Outdoor Recreation Act moved through their respective committees with unanimous support in 2023. If this legislation passes, it would direct NPS, Bureau of Land Management, and USFS to write new national climbing management guidance that protects safe, sustainable access to Wilderness climbing.

My recommendation:

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.