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First name: David

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear USFS Officers,

As a recreational rock climber for over 30 years who has climbed on many of our National lands, I write to suggest changes to the draft proposal for climbing management guidance issued on Nov 17, 2023.

As a Field Member of Seattle Mountain Rescue, I do not speak for the organization but I volunteer hundreds of hours each year to proactively educate the public, other climbers, and bring home from the backcountry those who become injured or lost. The presence of well-maintained fixed anchors and bolts are critical to the safety of those visitors, climbers, and rescuers like myself. Climbers need to be allowed to place bolts or fixed anchors where needed and when needed to manage the risks of a climb, and the climbing community itself is the group best positioned to make these decisions, as they have for over 50 years.

A prohibition on bolts or fixed anchors effectively prohibits safe recreational climbing. I believe it is unreasonable for federal agencies to create new policies prohibiting fixed anchors when they have allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades.

I strongly urge the USFS to remove the language on bolts and fixed anchors from its draft guidance at this time, and instead wait for the completion of the Protecting America's Rock Climbing (PARC) Act and the bipartisan Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act. Those Acts currently passing through Congress will change the mandate to the USFS and require changes to any regulations the USFS might issue now. Proposed language that would restrict the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" is unenforceable and confusing, as people have been climbing the rocks on our public lands from time immemorial.

Instead of bolts and fixed anchors, which have essentially zero impact on the wilderness, I encourage the USFS to focus on addressing the aspects of climbing that may impact the wilderness, such as access trails, camping, and human waste management.

The United States is a world leader in recreational climbing, and climbing builds the character and lives of the tens of millions of US citizens who participate. Climbing inspires millions more to go farther and achieve more than they thought they ever could. Please produce regulations that foster the long-term vitality of this important use of public lands.

Sincerely,

<the author>