

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/5/2024 8:56:05 PM

First name: Byron

Last name: Hempel

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Subject: Opposition to Proposed Directives on Fixed Anchors in Wilderness Areas

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed directives by the National Park Service (Draft Reference Manual 41: Wilderness Stewardship) and the U.S. Forest Service (FSM 2355 Climbing Opportunities) regarding the use of fixed anchors in wilderness areas. These changes represent a significant and detrimental shift in policy, threatening both the climbing community and the preservation of our wilderness areas.

For decades, the established use of fixed anchors has been integral to safe and responsible climbing. These anchors have allowed climbers to explore and enjoy the wilderness without undue harm to the environment. The proposal to classify fixed anchors as "prohibited installations" is not only a stark departure from this longstanding practice but also a decision that undermines climber safety and environmental protection.

Removing or prohibiting the maintenance of existing anchors will inevitably lead to increased reliance on natural features like trees for anchoring, which can cause far greater environmental impact. Moreover, the ability to replace aging bolts is crucial for climber safety. Without this, we risk turning previously safe routes into hazardous endeavors.

I understand and support the need for regulations that preserve the integrity of our wilderness areas. However, these proposed directives appear unenforceable and counterproductive. They risk increasing environmental degradation and compromising climber safety, which I am sure is not the intention of the National Park Service or the U.S. Forest Service.

Climbing is more than a sport; it's a means by which many of us connect deeply with nature. It teaches us respect for our environment, challenges our limits, and fosters a community of conservation-minded individuals. It is imperative that any policy changes reflect a balance between preserving these natural spaces and allowing the climbing community to safely enjoy them.

I urge you to reconsider these proposals and work with climbing organizations like the American Safe Climbing Association (ASCA) and the Access Fund to find a solution that upholds the spirit of the Wilderness Act while considering the safety and needs of the climbing community.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my views on this matter.

Sincerely,

Byron Hempel