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Organization:

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Comments: Dear folks at the Forest Service and National Park Service:

I have been an enthusiastic rock climber for more than 40 years and have climbed at hundreds of crags around the U.S. and beyond. I am deeply concerned about new policies under consideration regarding fixed anchors in wilderness. I request that you carefully consider the relatively small impacts of safety anchors used by climbers (when compared to, for instance, hiking trails) and the long-standing tradition of climbing in our nation's wilderness areas. Indeed, the very notion of the "freedom of the hills" is intertwined with mountaineering and rock climbing. Fixed anchors make ascents, descents, and even inevitable rescues, safer.

Rock climbing has become a popular and mainstream American pastime, and inevitably, more climbers venture into the wilderness. There are more people everywhere outdoors-hiking, riding horseback, scaling mountains-and yet the wilderness ethic must prevail to ensure the quality of our wilderness does not suffer from overuse.

"Sport climbing," which employs the use of many closely-spaced bolts to protect a climb up a relatively blank rock face, is an activity that requires scrutiny and management across our public lands. Should sport climbing be an allowed use in wilderness? This is a question that should be discussed and potentially regulated with collaboration between the Access Fund, The American Alpine Club, The American Safe Climbing Association, and federal land managers. The vast majority of rock climbs in American wilderness areas are low-key, low-impact routes which sometimes have fixed anchors for ascent and descent.

Learning of this potential disaster for wilderness climbing has put a dark pall on the New Year. The spiritual and physical refreshment that accompanies a brilliant day climbing in the backcountry is beyond compare. Please be prudent and fair as you consider devastating impacts on a user group that ardently supports the missions of the forest service and our national parks.