

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/7/2024 6:45:20 PM

First name: Christopher

Last name: Koppl

Organization:

Title:

Comments: My background: A career wildlife biologist (I worked for the Forest Service for 6 years), and somewhat prolific first ascensionist (meaning I have climbed numerous new routes in a variety of styles and have experience placing hundreds of bolts and other fixed hardware). I cherish and value wilderness and wilderness ethics, and believe they are compatible with fixed climbing anchors.

Fixed anchors are an essential element to the safe exploration of the wilderness climbing environment. Climbing has deep roots in seeking adventure in nature, an escape from the mundane, and is quintessentially a brief foray into a spectacular environment where one cannot remain for long. The very characteristics of wilderness are what draw climbers to it. Grand and majestic landscapes, remoteness, self-reliance - to ban fixed anchors in wilderness is to rob us of our potential to safely explore these things.

Climbers on the whole are an environmentally conscientious user group and have historically been self-policing. I have placed many bolts myself, and have replaced aging hardware 1:1 through the American Safe Climbing Association. Camouflaged hardware can be used, and on a large face there is no chance that an average person can spot a fixed anchor, even with binoculars. A retroactive ban on fixed anchors would erase America's climbing history, and rob future generations of climbers the same wilderness experience afforded to people before the ban went into effect.

The greatest environmental impacts from climbing are made during the first ascent: "gardening" or cleaning out cracks, scrubbing moss or lichen, etc. Extensive cleaning is more common to traditional boltless climbing, as clean cracks are required for upward progress and placement of temporary protection. Biologically speaking, bolted face climbs actually have a minimal impact on cliffside ecology (potential visual impact notwithstanding). non-fixed hardware such as pitons that are hammered in and removed have much more long-term damaging effects to the rock than a bolt which is placed once and then replaced every 25-50 years (typically in the same hole). Surely most climbers have moved to "clean climbing", placing protection such as nuts and cams, but cutting edge aid climbing (which is required to climb the most technically demanding routes) damages the rock resource more than fixed anchors.

Climbing is an incredibly diverse activity, and the impact can vary. Densely bolted "sport" crags may not be in the spirit of wilderness, but an occasional piece of fixed hardware to promote safe ascent (or more importantly, descent) should not negatively impact the wilderness experience of other users, or of other climbers.

It should not be illegal to protect one's health/life. An argument that if you don't want to risk death you shouldn't participate in a high risk activity like climbing does not hold water. Climbers want to challenge themselves, to explore, to push the limits of what it is to be human. At times when you are searching for the line between what you can and cannot do you bite off a bit more than you can chew - the natural protection runs out, the weather blows in, a partner falls and you want to safely retreat without causing additional risk for a rescue operation.

Instead of a bolt you could have a nylon sling that degrades in the sun and weather, has higher visual impact, and is not nearly as strong. Instead of a nylon sling you could wrap your rope directly over a tree, and with time the friction of the rope will girdle the tree, killing it. Instead of having a safe means of descent you could gate-keep the wilderness experience, and say that if you are not able to ascend to the summit and walk off that you are not worthy to climb the route, and if you want to retreat you are a criminal or deserve death.

Climbing history has long spurned the extraneous use of bolts, a minimalistic approach has always been considered the best style. Extra bolts that are added to existing routes are typically removed. Occasionally an

accident or similar can promote a community discussion and a bolt may be added to an existing route. I have come across bolts in remote areas that likely have not seen an ascent in over 30 years, that are made from all manner of home-made hardware, and are occasionally stamped with the unique identifying characteristics such as a climber's initials. These are historic testaments to those who traveled this path before us.

A state or federal agency does not have the funding, expertise, or human-power to safely and effectively remove existing bolts from the wilderness. While a permit system for the placement of new fixed hardware could be useful for land managers, it should be flexible and adaptable to unforeseen events during a climb, and should not be inherently punitive in nature. Self-reporting new routes by first ascensionists could be used as part of a system that replaces existing hardware on a fixed schedule to keep it safe, but an outright ban has no place in a society already stifled by loss of wild places and a public health crisis.

Climbing is a healthy way to interact with nature and should be considered a valid land use with historical precedence that should be promoted rather than discouraged. Promoting things such as responsible Leave No Trace ethics and supporting events such as the "Yosemite Facelift" where climbers remove trash generated by a variety of user groups would have a greater positive impact on wilderness areas.