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Comments: I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed changes in the fixed anchor policy, as outlined in the recent directives from the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service. The potential reinterpretation of the 1964 Wilderness Act to disallow fixed anchors in Wilderness areas deeply concerns me, and I urge you to reconsider this plan for the following reasons:

Impact on Access and Safety:

The use of fixed anchors, including bolts, webbing, and other safety tools, is crucial for ensuring the safety of individuals engaging in canyoneering activities. Restricting access to these essential tools jeopardizes the well-being of canyoneers and raises serious concerns about the feasibility of safely navigating technical canyons.

Subjective Nature of Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA):

The proposed MRA process adds an unnecessary layer of subjectivity to the evaluation of fixed anchor installations. Given the chronic underfunding of our parks and forests, the likelihood of thorough analysis for each installation is questionable. This could lead to arbitrary decisions and closures that significantly impact the canyoneering community.

Historical Precedents and Closures:

Past closures resulting from similar interpretations, such as the bolt prohibition in North Cascades National Park, serve as cautionary tales. The potential for this reinterpretation to empower other parks to impose similar restrictions is alarming, threatening the accessibility of iconic canyons across the country.

Broad Definition of Fixed Anchors:

The inclusive definition of fixed anchors, encompassing everything from webbing to traditional climbing protection, paints an unrealistic picture of canyoneering practices. This broad interpretation could render many canyons inaccessible and hinder the enjoyment of these natural wonders.

Tension between Land Managers and Canyoneers:

Enforcing such stringent policies could create unnecessary tension between land managers and the canyoneering community. I believe it is crucial to maintain a collaborative relationship that prioritizes both conservation efforts and the responsible enjoyment of our natural landscapes.

I kindly request that you reconsider these proposed changes and work towards a balanced solution that takes into account the safety of canyoneers, the practicalities of implementation, and the preservation of our shared natural heritage. Your commitment to striking this balance will not only ensure the continued enjoyment of these wilderness areas but also foster a positive relationship between the land management agencies and the outdoor community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I trust that you will carefully consider the implications of the proposed fixed anchor policy changes.

Sincerely,

Jayson Matthews