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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello.

My name is Isaac Roter. I have been an avid user of fixed anchors on public lands for the last six years and an avid general user of public lands my entire life. I am writing today to express my concern with the recently proposed new guidance policies regarding fixed anchors in Wilderness areas.

Fixed anchors are a critical component in the complex and robust safety systems that rock climbers employ in the exploration of vertical terrain on public lands. The installation and management of fixed anchors is a complex and involved process that many skilled and knowledgeable individuals and organizations have spent decades refining. If the federal government is going to get more closely involved in this process it needs to do so in close collaboration with local climbing organizations, the Access Fund, the American Safe Climbing Association, and other climbing and recreation management organizations and individuals that are experienced in stewarding vertical exploration. Neglecting the input of these representatives of the climbing community creates very real dangers for climbers venturing out into wilderness.

Climbing has grown dramatically in popularity even since I started climbing six years ago. With so many more climbers, and especially those newer to the pursuit and all the nuances of safety demanded by wilderness climbing, an increase in fixed anchor management is surely needed. However, if this management is done poorly, the stakes are even higher given the increased volume of land users depending on these anchors for their safety. The permanent removal of bolts and bureaucratic obstructions to bolt maintenance (which is done almost entirely by skilled volunteers) will almost certainly have fatal consequences. Fixed anchors provide climbers a means of securing themselves in dangerous positions when other options are often unavailable. Sometimes, even in the case of an available option that doesn't require fixed anchors, such as descending off the top of a route by foot, being able to descend via fixed anchors provides a safer experience with fewer hazards. With removed or improperly maintained fixed anchors, both new exploration and classic, historic routes will become more dangerous for the climbers that will undoubtedly still pursue them.

Fixed anchors enable passage up and down vertical routes that are not only an incredible jewel in the US's rich trove of recreation opportunities on public land, but are also an important part of the history and cultural legacy of these lands. When I clip a bolt in Yosemite, or Joshua Tree, or North Cascades, I am able to connect with the inspiring history of vertical explorers that envisioned and pioneered routes up these rock formations. Much like a cabin built by early settlers or petroglyphs painted by indigenous peoples, climbing routes and the fixed anchors upon which many of them depend represent a vibrant history of human interaction with our public lands. But this history is living and breathing, and these fixed anchors are meant to be used, so that the legacy of these routes continues. However, for the legacy that these fixed anchors constitute to persist, they require skilled maintenance. Many historic bolts were made with inferior technology and require updating for the climbing legacy to safely continue. This maintenance needs to have minimal logistical obstruction for the skilled and busy volunteers who perform it. The management of fixed anchors on public lands needs to be done with minimal bureaucratic obstruction and with maximal collaboration with the groups that use these important resources and have successfully managed them for decades.

Thank you.