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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello,

My name is Wiley Hundertmark, and I'm a dedicated climber and outdoor recreation enthusiast. I'm concerned with some of the proposals mentioned in the FSM2355 Climbing Opportunities directive. Specifically, the main policy that I'm concerned about has to do with the prohibition of fixed anchors in America's NFS lands.

Fixed anchors are an essential piece of climbers' safety system, and prohibiting anchors and bolts will create significant safety issues to climbers recreating in our national forests. In inclement weather or in the case of an emergency retreat / rescue situation, fixed anchors are the fastest and safest way to return a climbing party to safety. Prohibiting these anchors will make it more dangerous for climbers to venture into vertical terrain, and will make it more challenging for them to be rescued in an emergency. Additionally, without fixed anchors, climbers will be forced to use natural features as anchors, which adds to the wear and tear of trees and vegetation within the NFS land. Fixed anchors also allow climbers to rappel down the rock instead of eroding soil and fragile alpine vegetation while walking off a formation; further, fixed anchors are the most durable and lowest-impact rappel anchors, as climbers don't need to leave unsightly slings or cords on vegetation or the rock.

Many of the fixed anchors currently in place have been in place for decades, and I feel it's unreasonable for federal agencies to create new guidance policies when these policies have been working well. Currently, bolting in a wilderness area is only allowed by hand drill, which is an arduous and time-intensive process. In my experience, this keeps bolting to a minimum; I have never climbed in any wilderness area that has had unnecessary bolts or anchors. In addition, fixed anchors are not prohibited installations under the Wilderness Act.

Restricting replacement or installation of fixed anchors will make existing routes more hazardous, and creating any barriers (i.e. permits) to replacing/installing fixed anchors will inhibit ground-up adventurous climbing in NFS lands.

I'm in agreement of minimizing unnecessary or extraneous damage to the rock in terms of fixed anchors, but the proposed guidelines put both climbers and the environment at risk. Instead of outright prohibition, we need to focus on education; educating climbers on minimal impact methods, leave no trace techniques, encouraging clean climbing, and developing relationships between federal agencies and climbers. Partnering with local climbing organizations on these subjects will lead to better outcomes in terms of minimizing damages to wilderness and conserving these landscapes for generations to come.

Climbing is a well-established use of NFS lands and is just as legitimate as other uses such as backpacking or horseback riding. I have been fortunate enough to climb in NFS areas in several Western US states, and my days climbing there have been some of the greatest of my life. I have spent time in National Forest in Arizona, Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho, Montana, Colorado, and New Hampshire. Closer to home, many of my favorite climbing areas fall within the Coronado National Forest, just outside of Tucson, AZ. I climb in this National Forest several times a week. Restricting rock climbing threatens one of the primary ways that I connect with my natural environment, my friends, and my local community.

I'm particularly inspired by climbing in these areas, and I'm deeply concerned that this new legislation will threaten the safety of climbing in NFS lands and ultimately result in greater environmental damage to our beloved wilderness.

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments!

