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Comments: Dear US Forest Service,

Although the new policy draft on wilderness climbing management may have good intent, it has the potential to significantly hinder climbing in the US and make it more dangerous for participants. The climbing community has, for decades, maintained minimal bolt placements and fixed anchors on some of the most classic climbs in the US. These bolts allow climbing through sections that do not allow placing other protective gear and serve as reusable anchor points from which climbers can get down from a route. Some bolts, if removed or allowed to deteriorate, will force climbers into unsafe situations where they could take disastrous falls or pile up cords and other "tat" as it's called on trees or rocks that can be used as alternative anchor points. Or they will be forced to leave behind other protective gear. Bolts actually serve in these cases to help enforce leave-no-trace principles and encourage safer alternatives rather than potentially relying on old, weathered temporary gear to get down.

Climbers, although not perfect in every case, have largely left a legacy of placing the fewest bolts possible to ensure safety and finding ways to minimize the impact by, for instance, using durable stainless steel hardware and painting bolts to match the rocks, almost always at the expense of volunteers. Volunteer groups also play a large part in ensuring the safety and minimal nature of climbing protection by removing unnecessary placements, replacing rusty hardware, and finding ways to make modern bolts as small as possible. Their contributions take a lot of work each year at major climbing sites.

US national parks contain some of the most sought-after climbs in the world, and the climbing community is often misunderstood by well meaning landowners and caretakers. Putting more friction in the process by requiring approval processes and minimal requirements analyses will both consume more time and resources overall and exacerbate tensions between climbers and caretakers or landowners. This will result in decreased safety for rock climbers and decreased access to explore America's rich array of climbing opportunities in wilderness areas. It could even render many world-class routes unclimbable due to lack of resources in the prohibitive proposed management policy. After decades of well managed fixed anchors on climbing routes in wilderness areas, it is unreasonable to now suddenly prohibit climbing anchors or make them prohibitive to maintain.

I encourage you to rethink your policy and work with climbing agencies such as the Access Fund that has under its belt many years of maintaining and promoting responsible climbing.

Best regards,

Robert Polski