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Comments:

Dear members of the US Forest Service,

It saddens me that our national legislators are considering ill-informed policies with regard to the uses of fixed protection for rock climbing, a pastime that has quite literally made me who I am today. At age 11, I started a formative journey on the granite outcrops in Rocky National Park and around Colorado, then Utah, Wyoming, California and beyond. My dad was not a climber until after I started, and he accompanied me more as a chaperone than my guide. I learned grit and self-reliance, how to route-find and read maps and weather patterns; I learned problem solving and physics as if my life depended on it, because it did, and I became steeped in nature's subtle clues for route conditions, all while gaining invaluable experience of the deeper nuances between courage and humility. I tasted the freedom that comes with hard work, planning and perseverance. These are all skills and knowledge that have helped me in life and led me to become the editor-in-chief of Alpinist magazine, where I have been on staff since 2016, covering worldwide events. The magazine is distributed in 42 countries, because, like music, climbing is an internationally spoken language that is connected to the spirit as well as geography, climate and culture.

Just this past autumn, I wrote a Sharp End editorial for Issue 83 about this very topic, titled, "Climbing in Wilderness," that you can find online (<https://alpinist.com/features/climbing-in-wilderness/>). It is a very compact article as space was limited in the print magazine, and the amount of research I invested may not be apparent at first glance. I've followed these issues for much of my life, and for this article alone I read stacks of legal documents, starting with the Wilderness Act, and conducted hours of phone interviews, on and off the record.

Wilderness Watch-the Montana-based group that seems to be behind much of this movement, likely chewing the ears of some public officials in back rooms-is commonly referred to by other Wilderness advocates as "the Taliban of Wilderness." If you read between the lines of their policies, you can see why. It seems they would prefer to see ZERO humans in Wilderness. If they can get fixed climbing anchors to be seen through the eyes of the law as being the same as any other "installation," such as an outhouse or bridge, etc., then that gives them a hefty crowbar to move forward against other uses. Climbing will not be the last. (Yes, this is speculation that I rarely allow myself, but I am increasingly enraged by the hidden games at play that I cannot call out forthright.)

Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act and America's Outdoor Recreation Act-bipartisan bills-are well informed and should be supported. They will NOT open the flood gates to heavy climbing development, nor negate the tools that land managers have already been using to manage climbing quite effectively for half a century. In fact, it's the other way around: a decision against these bills would represent a 180-degree shift in policy. All PARCA and AORA propose is legal security for fixed protection that is necessary for climbers' safety and enjoyment. (Read my article above for more about that.)

Besides introducing new safety threats, banning fixed anchors would bring a much heavier burden to the land managers who will be tasked with crafting new guidelines and enforcement of unwieldy regulations.

Allow me to leave you with this quote from my Sharp End editorial regarding what I found after I approached Wilderness Watch with open ears, eager to better understand their position:

"I emailed Wilderness Watch asking if anyone on their staff had any climbing experience that they could talk about. They didn't. Ultimately I was forwarded to a man who did a lot of snow and ice climbing in the 1970s, including some big mountains in Alaska. He didn't want to be quoted, but said he mostly agreed with a recent

opinion by Mike Browning that was published in Colorado's Vail Daily on July 15. In it, Browning mentions bagging the Seven Summits and "all the Colorado 14ers and 500 other peaks around the world," before asserting that bolts unequivocally violate the Wilderness Act.

"Climbers-including me-look at sheer rock walls and want to climb them," Browning writes. "But must we always get what we want just because we want it? Can we not set aside 3% of our lands for true wilderness experiences?" The people who write these opinions never mention that those lands contain some of the best climbing on Earth. (And I wonder, how many ladders, fixed ropes and oxygen bottles did Browning use in his quest for the Seven Summits while flying around the world?)"

Thank you for your time and attention. Please make the correct, and easy decision, for the legacy of American rock climbing by supporting The PARC Act and AORA. The future of so many young people like me may lose out on the gifts that climbing has to offer.

Sincerely,

Derek Franz
Editor-in-Chief, Alpinist magazine