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Comments: I am writing to urge the National Park Service to reconsider and improve the current guidelines concerning the use of fixed anchors and bolts on climbing routes in wilderness areas. As a passionate climber who has found solace and strength in this sport during challenging times, I deeply understand the significance of safe and accessible climbing environments.

Fixed anchors are not merely equipment; they are crucial for climbers' safety and do not contravene the Wilderness Act's prohibition on "installations." For over fifty years, the climbing community has responsibly utilized these anchors, enhancing both the protection of Wilderness character and the experience of primitive, unconfined climbing. It seems unreasonable and counterproductive to suddenly shift policies and prohibit Wilderness climbing anchors, especially when they have been effectively managed and authorized by federal agencies for decades.

The proposed prohibition on fixed anchors not only undermines safety by complicating the maintenance of these critical safety devices—a task diligently undertaken by climbers—but also hinders the appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Climbing, at its core, requires making immediate, in-the-moment decisions, particularly in complex vertical terrains. An overly restrictive policy on fixed anchor maintenance could disincentivize safe anchor replacement and inadvertently lead to the removal of climbing routes.

From a personal perspective, climbing has been a transformative journey for me. It was a beacon of hope and resilience during my darkest hours, teaching me the true meaning of grit and determination. This sport has been instrumental in shaping my character, allowing me to push beyond my limits, which has not only led to my successful completion of a master's degree but has also brought me to the cusp of earning my PhD. The lessons learned from climbing have been integral to my academic and personal growth.

Prohibiting fixed anchors could potentially erase significant chapters of America's rich climbing legacy, including some of the world's most remarkable climbing achievements. The essence of climbing management policy should be to preserve existing routes while ensuring climber safety.

I strongly believe that with thoughtful and collaborative efforts, we can find a balance that respects both the preservation of our wilderness and the needs of the climbing community. As someone whose life has been profoundly changed by climbing, I implore the National Park Service to reconsider the current stance on fixed anchors and bolts, ensuring the safety and continuation of this empowering sport.

I would also like to address the proposal to restrict the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands. This approach seems unenforceable and is likely to create significant confusion among both land managers and the climbing community.

The distinction between Wilderness and non-Wilderness areas can be subtle and not always clearly demarcated, leading to potential misunderstandings and inadvertent policy violations by climbers. Such confusion could undermine the overall effectiveness of climbing management policies and could potentially lead to unnecessary confrontations between climbers and land managers.

Furthermore, it is crucial that non-Wilderness climbing management policies continue to allow opportunities for new anchors, unless specific analyses demonstrate a need to restrict climbing to protect cultural and natural resources. This approach ensures that climbing opportunities can evolve in response to the climbing community's needs, while still being sensitive to the conservation of our natural and cultural heritage.

Effective climbing management requires policies that are clear, enforceable, and adaptable to the diverse needs of climbers and the imperative of resource protection. I urge the National Park Service to consider these factors in revising its policies on fixed anchors and bolts, both in Wilderness and non-Wilderness areas.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

John R Duffy