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Comments: To Whom It May Concern at the U.S. Forest Service,

I am writing to share my concerns and provide constructive feedback on the proposed draft policy that aims to classify fixed anchors (including bolts, pitons, and slings) as "prohibited installations" in Wilderness areas under USFS management. This policy seems to overlook the critical importance of these anchors for the safety and sustainability of climbing activities in these pristine environments.

Fixed anchors have been an integral part of climbing safety for over six decades. Their use in Wilderness areas is not just a matter of convenience but a necessity for climber safety. The Wilderness Act, while promoting the preservation of wilderness character, does not explicitly prohibit such installations. The judicious use of fixed anchors is consistent with the principles of primitive and unconfined recreation, a foundational aspect of the Wilderness experience.

The proposed policy raises substantial safety concerns. Regular maintenance and replacement of existing anchors are essential to ensure safe climbing conditions. By classifying these anchors as prohibited installations, this policy could hinder necessary maintenance efforts, potentially leading to unsafe conditions and increasing the risk of accidents. The climbing community has a long-standing tradition of responsibly maintaining these anchors, and this self-regulation is crucial for the ongoing safety and sustainability of climbing in Wilderness areas.

Additionally, the policy could significantly limit appropriate exploration and enjoyment of Wilderness areas. Climbing inherently requires making in-the-moment decisions, especially in complex and challenging terrains. Restrictions on anchor placement could severely restrict climbers' ability to safely navigate these areas.

It's also important to consider the broader impact of this policy on America's climbing heritage. Prohibiting fixed anchors risks erasing important climbing achievements and could devalue the historical significance of established climbing routes. These routes are not just a part of climbing history; they are a testament to human endeavor and connection with nature that should be preserved for future generations to experience and appreciate.

In conclusion, I respectfully urge the U.S. Forest Service to reconsider this proposed policy. A balanced approach that allows for the responsible use and maintenance of fixed anchors, while still protecting the Wilderness areas' character, would be more appropriate. This could include guidelines for minimal and environmentally conscious use of fixed anchors, rather than a blanket prohibition.

Thank you for considering my perspective on this important issue. I hope that the final policy will reflect a harmonious balance between preserving the Wilderness character and ensuring the safety and historical legacy of the climbing community.

Sincerely,
Sean