

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/10/2024 3:06:23 PM

First name: Mike

Last name: Bangerter

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express my strong opposition to the recently proposed policies by the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) regarding fixed anchors in America's Wilderness areas. These policies, if implemented, would have a detrimental impact on the safety and legacy of the climbing community and the unique climbing experiences offered by some of our most iconic locations.

Fixed anchors, including bolts, pitons, and slings, play a crucial role in climbers' safety systems and have been a fundamental component of Wilderness climbing for over half a century. The proposed classification of fixed anchors as "prohibited installations" in Wilderness areas not only goes against established climbing precedent but also poses a significant threat to the safety of our climbing community.

Furthermore, the timing of these proposals is particularly concerning, given the progress of bipartisan legislation such as the Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act and America's Outdoor Recreation Act through Congress. These acts, enjoying unanimous support in their respective committees, aim to protect the legal and conditional use, placement, and maintenance of fixed anchors, providing a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to climbing management.

I urge the NPS and USFS to reconsider their proposed policies and align them with the impending legislation. Fixed anchors are not only essential for climbers' safety but are also a vital aspect of preserving America's climbing legacy and ensuring safe, sustainable access to Wilderness climbing.

In addition, I would like to highlight specific concerns regarding the proposed policies:

**Unreasonable Restriction:** Creating new guidance policies that prohibit Wilderness climbing anchors nationwide contradicts decades of federal agency management and authorization of fixed anchors. Such restrictions are unreasonable and fail to acknowledge the responsible and safe practices followed by the climbing community.

**Safety Implications:** Prohibiting fixed anchors will introduce unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of these anchors, a responsibility shouldered by the climbing community. Critical safety decisions often require immediate action, and any authorization process should not hinder these decisions. Managing fixed anchor maintenance in a way that encourages safe replacement is paramount.

**Exploration and Legacy:** The prohibition of fixed anchors obstructs appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas and poses a threat to America's rich climbing legacy. Climbing management policies should be designed to protect existing routes from removal, preserving some of the world's greatest climbing achievements.

For USFS-specific comments, the restriction on the establishment of new routes in Wilderness areas is problematic and unenforceable. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors, considering analyses to determine if climbing restrictions are necessary for the protection of cultural and natural resources.

I implore you to consider the concerns raised by the climbing community and work towards a balanced and sustainable approach to climbing management that ensures the safety of climbers, preserves our climbing legacy, and maintains the unique experiences offered by America's Wilderness areas.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.