

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/10/2024 8:26:32 PM

First name: Hill

Last name: Belfi

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to oppose the proposed restrictions on fixed anchors due to its impact on my sport, canyoneering. I have been a member of this recreational community for 5 years, and it is how I have accessed my favorite trips to explore and enjoy our wilderness areas. I am concerned that this proposal, and the unfunded MRA process required to install fixed anchors, will prevent exploration of new canyons as well as preventing safe access and enjoyment of existing canyons.

1. Fixed anchors in wilderness areas have saved my life. During a canyoneering trip in the Southwest united states, a non-fixed anchor (webbing) broke out of the rock while I was on rappel, and I fell approximately 20 feet and sustained a head injury. Due to the presence of fixed anchors through the rest of the canyon, I was able to be evacuated through the remaining rappels safely and quickly by a small team of other canyoneers, and reach emergency care. It was a non-fixed anchor that failed, and if my team had to build anchors through the rest of the canyon, it would have taken twice as long to evacuate.

2. I have canyoneered in regions that do not allow fixed anchors and in location promote considerate, low-impact fixed anchors such as bolts. In regions where we relied on non-fixed anchors, I saw more impact to the natural elements such as trees and rocks, as we constantly had to move rocks or abrade trees to place "ghost" anchors. Even with all precautions such as rotating where we built anchors and cutting down extra webbing, it was easy to see the impact of "ghost" anchors on the environment. In contrast, our fixed anchors are placed thoughtfully in a single, lasting location that is out of view from nearby hiking trails whenever possible. The natural environment is not rebuilt around us.

Overall, I believe that this sport, loved by a large, dedicated community across the country, cannot continue to exist without the ability to place fixed anchors in accordance with local land management teams who best understand the nuances of the environments they steward.

The cayoneering community has already seen bolt bans in many of our beloved places due to inability of land management to use the MRA process. Canyoneering is how I got to know the incredible wild spaces of California when I moved here from Georgia, and how I built my community in a brand-new place far from home. I would like to express support for the SOAR act instead, which allows the communities who rely on the maintenance and preservation of wilderness spaces, to access them appropriately.