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First name: Peter

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear USFS,

My wife and I are writing in regards to the proposed draft policies regarding fixed anchors policies in America's National forests.

We are active older-aged rock climbers and hikers and we rely on the integrity of existing and yet-to-be developed fixed anchors in and out of our wilderness areas for our safety. Truly, our life depends on the existence and integrity of these fixed anchors and bolts. We are not experts in fixed anchors and bolts, so we seriously rely on our local and national climbing organizations to establish and maintain these anchors with our life in their hands.

While my wife and I climb and mountaineer mainly in the Coronado National Forest around Tucson, AZ, we also travel around the country to many National Parks and National Forest Service areas to do these activities. So, our concern is not entirely on how detrimental these policies will be in our local areas, but also at a national level ... and the impact of these policies would be extreme, even just in our local area around Tucson.

The activities of rock climbing and mountaineering in and out of our Wilderness areas are a wonderful and relatively low-impact outdoor activity. It is the main way that we get to enjoy our National Parks and National Forests and Wilderness areas. We feel rock climbing and mountaineering activities have an extremely low impact on our natural areas when compared with activities like snowmobiling, ATV driving, off-road vehicle driving and many other outdoor activities - even hiking where establishing hiking trails that many thousands of people use has much more impact than what a few hundred climbers might have in or outside a wilderness area.

The Tucson area, particularly the Coronado National Forests, feature excellent climbing areas and are a strong draw for climbers and mountaineers from around the country and around the world. It is an important economic draw of tourists to this area, but these tourists rely on these fixed anchors for their very lives. Limiting and not maintaining these anchors would be a serious detriment to this area and would risk the lives of those who do pursue these activities in this area.

We feel that prohibiting fixed anchors will create serious safety issues for my wife and me, and will significantly inhibit our ability to explore our wilderness areas. Establishing these fixed anchors requires expertise of experienced rock climbers and mountaineers and prohibiting them will do little for protecting our environment, but will have dire consequences for those who rely on and utilize these safety systems.

It seems that policies should be developed to coordinate maintenance and development of fixed anchor systems along with mitigating the impact of the environment, but without prohibiting the placement and maintenance of new and existing equipment. It seems that proper policies would work toward coordinating fixed anchor maintenance and development with national and local climbing organizations rather than simply prohibiting these activities that have a rich history in the United States.

We know that our local climbing organization in Southern Arizona (CASA, the Climbing Association of Southern Arizona) works diligently with our local National Forest Service and the climbing community to maintain local fixed anchors both within and outside of Wilderness areas in a manner respectful of the environs. This organization, like all climbing organizations, are sensitive to protecting our wilderness areas and thus should be considered an important ally in forming decisions about how to manage any specific fixed anchor systems in place and those that are being developed.

We feel that the current proposed policies would do an injustice to major users of our parks, wilderness areas, and national forest areas outside of wilderness area. These policies as currently developed would create a major safety hazard for my wife and me and would seriously limit our opportunities to enjoy these areas when we do so in a very low impact way already.

We would ask that you develop alternate policies that would protect and maintain safe and sustainable access to Wilderness climbing and mountaineering and that these policies would direct the NPS to work closely with local and national climbing and mountaineering organizations to develop practical solutions to the minor impacts fixed anchors have on our parks and in and out of our Wilderness areas.

Sincerely,

Peter Underwood & Mary Jarosz

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