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Comments: I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the recently released draft policies by the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) that would classify fixed anchors as "prohibited installations" in America's Wilderness areas. These proposed policies, if implemented, would have severe implications for the climbing community and the legacy of Wilderness climbing in our country.

Fixed anchors, including bolts, pitons, and slings, play a crucial role in climbers' safety systems and have been responsibly used for over 60 years in accordance with sustainable Wilderness climbing precedent. The proposed classification of fixed anchors as prohibited installations threatens to hinder Wilderness exploration, endanger longstanding established routes, and impede climbers' ability to replace old, unsafe bolts.

I am particularly troubled by the potential safety issues that may arise from the unnecessary obstacles to regular maintenance of fixed anchors. Climbers have responsibly undertaken the crucial task of maintaining these anchors for decades, and any authorization process that impedes their ability to make critical safety decisions in the moment is unacceptable. The proposed policies do not consider the intricacies of climbing safety and maintenance, putting our community at risk.

Furthermore, I am concerned about the restrictions proposed for the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands. This approach is unenforceable and will undoubtedly create confusion amongst land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

It is unreasonable for federal agencies to create new guidance policies that outright prohibit Wilderness climbing anchors across the country. Instead of hindering climbers' access to Wilderness areas, we urge NPS and USFS to follow existing climbing policies that have allowed for the judicious use of fixed anchors for decades. These policies have effectively protected Wilderness character while providing for primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing.

Furthermore, I would like to draw attention to the bipartisan Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act and America's Outdoor Recreation Act currently progressing through Congress. If enacted, these acts would direct NPS, Bureau of Land Management, and USFS to develop new national climbing management guidance that ensures safe, sustainable access to Wilderness climbing.

In conclusion, I strongly oppose the proposed policies by NPS and USFS that classify fixed anchors as prohibited installations in Wilderness areas. I urge you to consider the potential impact on climbers' safety, the rich climbing legacy of our nation, and the ongoing legislative efforts to protect climbing access in Wilderness areas.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Brian Stevens