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Comments: To whom it may concern:

I am writing today to comment on the draft policies just released regarding rock climbing in wilderness areas and the use of fixed anchors. My background includes 14 years of climbing in many areas around the United States, 10 years of rock climbing guiding in multiple USFS districts, and countless other recreation endeavors on public lands. My opinion on this topic is that fixed anchors should be allowed and maintained in Wilderness Areas with a reasonable management plan in consultation with native peoples, the public, and the rock climbing community.

Fixed anchors (bolts) have been used for decades to make rock climbing more accessible and safer. Even in the case of traditional rock climbing (climbing without bolts), bolts are commonly used at the top of the route to simplify descending a single pitch or continuing on a multi-pitch. When there are no bolts at these anchor stations and climbers are unable to build an anchor using natural protection, climbers end up leaving webbing (tat) which is less durable/degrades quickly and is more visibly obtrusive. Bolts also facilitate the descent of routes. Bolts should only be used within reason when natural (clean) protection is not possible to reasonably protect the climber in the event of a fall. With this being said, I do believe that every climbing area needs to have a climbing advocacy group create a process for new bolting and bolt replacement to ensure every bolt placed is done correctly and no "rouge bolting" occurs.

Rock climbing in wilderness areas is a unique and impactful way to connect with the environment and place. Compared to other activities done in wilderness areas (ie. horseback-riding, camping, fishing, etc...), rock climbing has minimal environmental and aesthetic impact yet provides another way people can appreciate natural land features and wilderness areas. In the situations when rock climbing may impact ecosystem health (ex. falcon and raptor nesting), reasonable, evidence-based climbing closures may be put in place to preserve the native species of a region.

For these reasons, I believe rock climbing and the use of fixed protection should be allowed in wilderness areas with a reasonable management plan put in place.

Thank you,
Dave Erbe