

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/11/2024 3:58:09 PM

First name: Arlene

Last name: Dawson

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom it may concern,

I am writing in opposition to the proposed ban on fixed anchors in designated wilderness areas for the following reasons:

It is unreasonable for federal agencies to create new guidance policies prohibiting Wilderness climbing anchors across the country when they have allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades. It is especially unreasonable that the rule changes and development of the management plans come with no funding mechanism attached. The changes will place an unnecessary and unsustainable management burden upon the already short-staffed Forest Service.

Fixed anchors are essential to the safety of rock climbers, as well as other recreational user groups. Prohibiting fixed anchors will create safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of fixed anchors, a responsibility undertaken by the climbing community. Critical safety decisions often must be made in the moment and any authorization process should not impede those decisions. Fixed anchor maintenance needs to be managed in a way that incentivizes safe anchor replacement and does not risk the removal of a climbing route.

Prohibiting rock climbing in wilderness areas will increase environmental impact by consolidating climbing into fewer areas.

Rock climbing is a well-accepted and celebrated activity on the Coronado National Forest (CNF), with routes established well before the 1964 Wilderness Act. The CNF celebrates rock climbing on its homepage as a major forest activity. The southern Arizona community has been effectively collaborating with the Coronado National Forest for decades to improve forest lands and steward areas via dozens of volunteer efforts. The proposal threatens the positive working relationship that many land managers and rock climbers have worked diligently to foster.

The US Forest Service and National Park Service should consider existing fixed anchors in and outside of wilderness to be approved and appropriate until such time that a resource analysis can be done to determine if each fixed anchor is inappropriate.

A climbing management plan should include the voices of the climbing community. We can work together to protect wilderness areas and enjoy recreating therein.

Sincerely,

Arlene Dawson

Tucson, AZ