

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/4/2024 1:49:41 AM

First name: Kate

Last name: Nelson

Organization: Pikes Peak Climbers Alliance

Title: President

Comments: Dear United States Forest Service,

I am writing today as a representative of the Pikes Peak Climbers Alliance, a local climbing organization based out of Colorado Springs, Colorado that serves the greater Pikes Peak region and helps manage climbing areas like Shelf Road, the South Platte, Devil's Head, and more. We believe that the ability to place responsible fixed hardware in the wilderness should be protected and that recently drafted language proposing bans of fixed hardware endanger recreation and resource preservation.

Fixed hardware is an essential element of climbing, as it often allows access to otherwise unreachable places and gives climbers the ability to climb safely and make decisions based on their surroundings. Many of the country's greatest climbing areas and climbs are accessible, safe, and preserved for future generations thanks to fixed hardware. Fixed hardware, like bolted anchors, also helps reduce the use of temporary hardware like slings, ultimately making climbs safer and more sustainable for the resource. Just as with pit toilets and campgrounds, having the ability to place fixed hardware on routes concentrates impact rather than creating dispersion that would cause greater harm to the resource.

We strongly believe that judicious, appropriate placement of fixed hardware should be maintained and is defensible. Climbers are conscientious stewards that understand their responsibility to future generations when it comes to placing fixed hardware and can use good judgment to place only essential fixed hardware that does not unreasonably affect the natural resource but continues to allow for wilderness exploration via climbing.

To repudiate the past 60 years of fixed hardware status quo introduces an unacceptable risk as it would change the ability to protect a route and the capacity to preserve established routes. These routes not only serve as a testament to the incredible history of rock climbing and exploration in the United States, but as amazing opportunities for all climbers to experience our incredible public lands.

Wilderness exploration that protects the resource should be allowed and encouraged, as the only way to truly preserve our wild lands is by way of action through investment. People who have transformative experiences outside will put in the effort to protect the resources they care about. When we promote and create opportunities for all kinds of responsible recreators, like climbers, we kindle a lifelong love of the outdoors that naturally turns so many people into passionate advocates for our public lands.

We hope that this point of reflection can be used to forge stronger partnerships between land managers, local climbing organizations, and the climbing community at large. It is impossible to be omniscient, especially when many government entities are already stretched thin and the ability to implement and enforce blanket ban policies like this will be difficult at best and impossible at worst. We can offer eyes, ears, and insight where it can be difficult for government agencies to operate. We wholeheartedly believe that through open, honest communication and strong relationships we can protect our natural resources and climbing for the future. Prohibiting fixed hardware is not the solution. We appreciate the time you are dedicating to this issue and remain committed to working together to find the best solution moving forward.

Sincerely,

The Pikes Peak Climbers Alliance