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First name: Andrew

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Organization: Arkansas Climbers Coalition

Title: Vice-President

Comments: To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Andrew Blann I am a Fayetteville, Arkansas based rock climber and outdoor recreation enthusiast. I also serve as the Vice-President of the Arkansas Climbers Coalition. I started climbing 20 years ago and it has led me to countless adventures and unforgettable experiences in wild places. It's safe to say that my experiences with climbing and the places it has taken me, has inspired a life long commitment to protecting public lands and wild areas.

I find the recent USFS proposals on limiting fixed anchors in wilderness concerning and problematic and encourage the USFS to reconsider this proposal. While I find it refreshing that the USFS plans to recognize climbing as an appropriate use of forest service lands, the new proposal leaves many unanswered questions, is somewhat vague and has the potential to negatively impact the rock climbing experience in unnecessary and burdensome ways. A few key points I and the Arkansas Climbers Coalition find most troublesome include:

Reinterpretation of the Wilderness Act to recognize fixed anchors as prohibited "installations." The classification of fixed anchors as prohibited goes against 60+ years of climbing management and will severely limit climbers' ability to safely experience unconfined recreation in Wilderness areas. Interpreting small and unobtrusive safety devices (when placed with care) as an installation only serves to make management of climbing spaces more difficult and will draw on already stretched public lands funding.

The requirement of an MRA for the replacement, maintenance and installation of new fixed anchors is burdensome, difficult to enforce, underfunded and has the potential to place climbers in dangerous situations when using fixed anchors as key pieces of the safety system. I fear that District Rangers and land managers that personally disapprove of rock climbing will use the MRA and their position to severely limit climbing opportunities without input from climbers and the climbing community.

Where will the funding come from? In my experience, public lands agencies are severely underfunded. If proper funding is not in place, then MRAs will not take place, new and replacement of fixed anchors will not occur and these new policies will serve as a way to de facto ban climbing on USFS land.

I am a proponent for limiting climbing when necessary, whether that's due to natural or cultural resource protection, user conflicts or some other relevant topic. However, I am greatly opposed to limiting climbing for the sake of limiting climbing. This new policy, however well intentioned, is providing a framework for land managers to limit climbing and remove rock climbers from decisions that will shape the future of our public lands.

As an avid rock climber and proponent of public lands and wild spaces, I urge you to reconsider this proposal and find a better solution to balance climbing in wilderness and non-wilderness areas with practical and sensible management policies.

Regards,

Andrew Blann  
Fayetteville, AR