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Comments: Dear US Forest Service

As an avid rock climber for the last 24 years I am very interested and concerned about the new policies you are developing regarding fixed anchors in America's wilderness lands. I am an ardent supporter of protecting and maintaining wilderness areas. However, I think the proposed guidance is far outside of the bounds of reasonable interpretation of the Wilderness Act.

Rock climbing is a very well-established recreational use of our national parks and wilderness lands. Fixed anchors are well established, necessary devices used to protect climbers both during ascent of otherwise unsafe expanses of rock, and as points of protection for safe belays and for safe escapes (rappelling). They have been used for more than 60 years. They are not prohibited installations under the Wilderness Act. Prohibiting fixed anchors or removing already existing anchors will create serious safety issues to climbers and to the rescue squads dispatched in an emergency (at which point the rescue squads will be forced to create fixed anchors for safety reasons).

Fixed anchors in wilderness are in mostly out of the way places that have no impact on other user groups in the area. The vast majority of fixed anchors in the wilderness are way off the ground and can only be seen by rock climbers who are using these anchors. To prohibit the use of fixed anchors effectively prohibits rock climbing in wilderness areas. I believe there can be compromises and that the input of the Access Fund and local climbing organizations should be sought out before dramatically re-interpreting laws.

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 climbing routes.

Finally, prohibiting fixed anchors will threaten America's rich climbing legacy and could erase some of the world's greatest climbing achievements. Climbing management policy needs to protect existing routes from removal.

Sincerely,

Ben Ricketts