

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/16/2024 6:12:57 PM

First name: Justin

Last name: Jendza

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Here, as I'm sure many already have and will continue to, I am enclosing a succinct set of commentaries relating to the proposed changes to the wilderness bolting rules that are currently being considered by the USFS.

As a long-time climber in both wilderness and non-wilderness areas as well as an employee of and contractor for the USFS and NPS for just short of twenty years, I am acutely aware of this issue and how it will affect both climbers and non-climbers alike.

The central issue as I see it involves the safety of climbers and rescue personnel. Having lived and worked in Yosemite, Olympic, and Saguaro National Parks as well as numerous Forest Service wilderness areas and Golden Gate National Recreation Area I have witnessed the many scenarios in which bolts and fixed anchors have played a crucial role in both ensuring the safety of climbers and the rescue teams who have been called upon to utilize said bolts in saving the lives of injured climbers as well as recovering the bodies of those deceased.

I have also personally utilized many of these fixed anchors all over the country thanks to the climbers who have placed them and the many climbers and non-profit organizations that have helped to maintain and replace them over the years. I have also been subject to many scenarios in which the absence of fixed anchors and the complete lack of natural anchors has led to instances in which fate and luck have been the only saving graces in keeping my limbs intact. No doubt my own learned and natural abilities have come into play in these cases, but many friends, acquaintances and fellow climbers have paid dearly when things went wrong and critical decisions had to be made in the absence of proper anchors. The cases are all too clearly laid out in accounts published annually in Accidents in North American Mountaineering by the American Alpine Club.

The removal and prohibition of fixed anchors will undoubtedly lead to an increase in these kinds of accidents, and will only serve to place an unnecessary and increased risk upon rescue personnel who are forced into making critical decisions without the proper tools at their disposal. The long history of allowing these anchors and the decidedly critical role that they have played in maintaining a legacy of safe climbing in the United States coupled with the vital function they serve as an expedient to first line rescue teams makes any consideration of banning them an absolutely unthinkable evolution for rock climbing and mountaineering in this country.

Furthermore, the need of climbers to utilize and place new fixed anchors in their exploration of vertical terrain in wilderness areas across the United States does not change in the face of sentiments that aim to end the use of them. Where life and limb is in question there can be no doubt that flaunting a rule change in respect to banning fixed anchors will force the hand of the climber to take their safety as paramount over this proposed ban were it to go into effect. And to create a scenario in which no new climbing routes were to be allowed in wilderness areas due to a ban on fixed anchors is an unprecedented and foolhardy attempt to make a provisional discrimination against a recreational use that has a long and storied history in the wilderness.

In closing, I'd like to offer that fixed anchors are a necessary part of rock climbing, whether it be in wilderness or non-wilderness area, and that banning them will impose and encourage an unnecessary increase toward riskier climbing and rescue techniques. Fixed anchors are small, not readily visible to the untrained eye, and in terms of sheer area represent one of the smallest incursions of man-made imprint upon the wilderness. In comparison with many other industrial and human made artifacts imposed on our wild areas, these represent an exceedingly diminutive though wildly successful advance. Without them it is certain that the number of accidents and fatalities will increase.

Climbing is experiencing an unprecedented renaissance and recruitment of new members thanks to the explosion of climbing gyms across the nation and its exposure as a new Olympic sport. The use of fixed anchors in wilderness areas by climbers is undoubtedly at an all-time high and will only continue to increase as more climbers join the sport. It is my hope that the USFS will see through a pragmatic solution to this proposal that endorses their continued safe and thoughtful use now and in the future. Anything less will be a deep disservice to allowing safe access in the wilderness that has all but been guaranteed across many generations of climbers. Please allow this precedent to stand intact. Our lives depend on it. And our souls too. Climbing is not only a recreational pursuit, but a window into the deep ethos of wilderness that includes the human race as a participatory element, serving and protecting. Experiencing it is the first step toward becoming good stewards.