

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/16/2024 10:08:05 PM

First name: Dan

Last name: Long

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to implore you to allow for a reasonable usage of bolts or fixed anchors for climbing within wilderness areas. Climbing anchors are small and unobtrusive. These fixed anchors are typically only visible to a person on that particular climb, but they provide for vastly superior safety measures for climbers, rappellers and rescuers.

While it is true that "traditional" climbing protection is removable by the party on the ascent, the same is not true when descending a climb. Except in the case of a walk-off climb (where one descends a nearby feature that is not technical in nature), one must rappel a route to get back to the ground. In the absence of a responsible number fixed anchors (bolt, pitons, etc.), a climber is forced to rappel from trees, boulders, or other natural features in the area-features that may or may not exist in required numbers or locations to allow for safe descent, and that will concentrate environmental wear and degradation. In the absence of such features, a climber must leave climbing gear and anchor materials to get down. In addition to being more visible from below, this abandoned gear will be subject to greater weathering effects than fixed anchors would be, and becomes a greater safety issue than if the fixed anchor was allowed in the first place. Responsible use of fixed anchors also permit a measure of safety on rock faces that are scalable, but otherwise offer little or no means of safely protecting.

The visual impact of fixed anchors offers far less intrusion than trail systems (approved or social trails) themselves are within wilderness. Fixed climbing anchors result in less environmental degradation than the use of stock does on wilderness area trails and vegetation, or than tent pads and campfire scars-or most other acceptable uses within wilderness areas.

The decision to ban fixed climbing anchors in wilderness areas would only result in making an approved activity substantially more dangerous-for ascents and descents, as well as for the future maintenance of this hardware on existing routes.

The potential requirement for USFS analysis of every new or replaced fixed anchor will be onerous, to the public and to the unit's administration. Additionally, this level of oversight could potentially open up the USFS to litigation in the event of a failure to appropriately maintain such equipment. Current funding levels do not make safe management of this type of equipment or user group a priority for USFS.

I would urge you to carefully consider the risk/benefit associated with additional management or banning of climbing anchors on USFS lands.

Thank you.

-Dan