

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/16/2024 11:48:15 PM

First name: David

Last name: Degner

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear US Forest Service,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed restrictions on the establishment of new climbing routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands. This policy is likely to create confusion amongst land managers and climbers, and I believe that non-Wilderness climbing management should continue to provide opportunities for new anchors unless specific analyses determine that climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

Firstly, I would like to emphasize that fixed anchors are an essential component of climbers' safety systems and should not be considered prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Existing climbing policies, which have allowed for the judicious use of fixed anchors for over half a century, strike a balance between preserving Wilderness character and enabling primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing experiences. Therefore, it is unreasonable for federal agencies to introduce new guidance policies that would prohibit fixed anchors in Wilderness climbing areas, especially considering their longstanding allowance, management, and authorization. Moreover, prohibiting fixed anchors would give rise to safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of these anchors, a responsibility that the climbing community has consistently taken on. Climbing often necessitates making critical safety decisions in the moment, and any authorization process should not hinder these vital judgments. It is essential to manage fixed anchor maintenance in a way that encourages safe anchor replacement and eliminates the risk of unintentionally removing established climbing routes. Furthermore, prohibiting fixed anchors would impede the appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Land managers should enable climbers to navigate complex vertical terrains and make in-the-moment decisions crucial to their safety and overall climbing experience. By allowing such flexibility, climbers can fully engage with and appreciate the natural wonders of Wilderness areas.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the potential threat that the prohibition of fixed anchors poses to America's rich climbing legacy. Countless exceptional climbing achievements around the world are intricately tied to the existence of fixed anchors. Climbing management policies must prioritize the protection of existing routes from removal to ensure that future generations can continue to cherish and be inspired by these remarkable accomplishments.

In light of the above, I respectfully urge you to reconsider the proposed restrictions on fixed anchors in climbing management policy. I firmly believe that maintaining opportunities for new anchors, unless analyses specifically indicate a need for restrictions to protect cultural and natural resources, would be a more practical and effective approach.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns. I trust that you will carefully evaluate the potential impact of the proposed policy changes and work towards preserving both the safety of climbers and the integrity of our climbing heritage.

Sincerely,

David Degner