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Title:

Comments: Dear US forest service,

As an avid climber for the last 10 years, I am very concerned about the policies being developed regarding fixed anchors in public wilderness lands. There are three points I and the climbing community would like to clarify:

1. Climbing and canyoneering are popular and established forms of recreational use in our national parks and wilderness lands.
2. Fixed anchors are well-established devices used to protect climbers and canyoneers during ascent and descent of rock faces and as points of protection for safe belays and escapes. These fixed anchors have been used since the 1960's and are not prohibited installations under the Wilderness Act.
3. 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).

The sport of climbing has grown substantially, and bolt-protected routes do not invalidate the above points, it only forces an increased scrutiny of their impact on the natural resource in which they are occurring. Any ruling that entirely bans climbing and fixed anchors will cripple safe access to public land use, economic growth, and traditional established land use.

A compromise that is fair both from an environmental standpoint and from a comparison to other traditional land uses and their relative impact needs to be developed. For example, to eliminate safe climbing practices (occasional fixed anchors) but to allow safe trail construction so humans and horses can get into the wilderness would not be a fair compromise. Both are necessary for safety, and the latter has far more visual impact than the former. The majority of climbing cliffs in the wilderness are in areas where the non-climbing public rarely ventures closer than a few thousand yards, and most fixed anchors, especially bolts or pitons (especially if camouflaged), are invisible to anyone not standing very near them.

I do not believe the impact climbing makes is as significant as many other uses that are condoned in our forests. Whether you believe it or not, climbers as a group are very supportive of wilderness preservation. However, this issue of fixed anchors is making our community closely re-evaluate what "environmentally conscious" actually means and reconsider a number of donations made to environmental groups. Please be careful and thoughtful of all of us.

Sincerely,

Colton Gordon