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Comments: I am writing to oppose the plan to restrict fixed anchors in wilderness. It's difficult for me to understand why after many years of allowing the practice of using slings, pitons, and bolts to enable safe climbing (and mostly, safe descent), the NPS and USFS are seeking to abolish the use of this safety equipment. If the goal is to restrict impact, I would suggest that off trail travel, climate change, invasive species, novel disease spread, and grazing pose greater threats to wilderness areas. Climbing has become more popular, but it's still not that popular, and cliffs represent such a small portion of wilderness areas.

I agree it is important to balance impact of use with the benefits we gain from accessing wilderness, but rock climbing is a legitimate activity in wilderness areas. It has also been going on for a long time, and is intricately tied to the history of numerous National Parks (Yosemite, Joshua Tree, Zion, Sequoia-Kings Canyon). The current proposals would at best lead to confusion, and at worst would lead to an end to climbing in wilderness and dangerous climbing conditions. That is, to my understanding, the proposed rules also ban the maintenance of existing anchors. This is hard to understand, and has led to problems elsewhere, where climbers repeat existing routes, only to find the descent hardware has become unsafe/dangerous to use. Imagine trying to descend from a tall pillar in the dark, with only rusting, hardware store equipment from the 1960's to attach your rope to. Fixed anchors also have such a limited impact, being restricted to a few square inches, and becoming largely invisible if properly camouflaged (bolts can be painted in advance to match the rock color, which is policy in places like Arches).

In my own experience, the backcountry climbing experiences I have had are among some of my most fond memories that have strongly shaped who I am. They have inspired me to work harder in my own career to protect or encourage the protection and conservation of our natural resources across the West. In my own work I now investigate the physiology of very tall coast redwoods, climbing these trees using some of the same techniques I developed through rock climbing.

I would hope that more, not fewer people may have similar experiences. Such wilderness climbs may bring people out from the urban, largely commercial experience that rock climbing can entail in an metro area, into engrossing and life changing experiences in some of the last wild places we have left on this earth.

Please do not impose the proposed policies without first exploring detailed engagement with groups like the Access Fund and the American Alpine Club, who can help to craft a more balanced approach. These groups represent a major element of the voice of rock climbing recreationalists in the US. And while these groups seek to protect America's climbing first and foremost, I know that the people in these organizations also share a desire to protect and conserve wilderness that is entirely consistent with the goals of the National Park Service and the USFS.

Thank you for reading my letter.