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Comments: To whom it may concern,

This is written in response to the new National Parks Service and U.S. Forest Service suggested policy for sport climbing bolts and fixed/bolted anchors in Wilderness areas.

From the information, I've acquired, I understand the suggested policy would restrict bolting in certain areas and create more than unnecessary bureaucratic processes for bolting sport climbs in these areas. Moreover, the policy would implement the removal of fixed climbing anchors, an important part of the safety of many sport and traditional (trad) climbing routes.

This policy would not only create unnecessary risk for climbers and cause friction between the USFS & NPS and climbing communities in these areas, but it would create increased risk for canyoneers and search and rescue personnel.

Firstly, climbers have been and continue to be some of the best Stewards of wilderness areas. Organizations such as the Climbing Association of Southern Arizona (CASA, my local organization in Tucson, an area that will be highly impacted by this policy) have been working alongside the USFS in restoration, clean-up projects, graffiti removal, trail maintenance, and more. It is also notable to mention CASA members/climbers help with raptor monitoring and other wildlife closure education, and with search and rescue efforts. In general, the climbers I know (including myself, a student of natural resources at the UofA) are stewards of these areas and work professionally, or voluntarily, to keep these areas thriving. These policies would cause friction between these communities and these agencies, both of which are very important to the climbers, myself, and the preservation of wilderness areas.

The removal of fixed anchors is a dramatic and dangerous policy for not only the climbers who rely on them but other recreation and professional users. Climbing anchors are used not only by climbers but by canyoneers and other recreation members who require them for access to their sporting areas. The removal would cause people to seek alternative means of accessing these areas, usually ways that would cause serious safety risks. People will always try to find a way to use and access areas regardless of their personal safety, some more than others. This not only puts people in danger but creates situations where search and rescue (SAR) crews will need to be dispatched and without proper anchors access to areas where recreationists need rescue becomes a hazard to the rescuers themselves. Not only do SAR crews need anchors to rescue climbers but hikers, mountain bikers, backpackers, etc. also find themselves in need of help with the assistance of an anchor. Removal of these anchors creates dangerous situations for rescuers and will take more time and unnecessary risk to complete a rescue, this is a major reason anchors should not be removed.

With help from large and local climbing community organizations the NPS and USFS have been not only maintaining and constructing climbing areas for the past 50 years, but climbing has been a way to bring visitors in national parks and forests (Crag Against Humanity in the Coronado National Forest for instance was established with help and guidance from the National Forest Service). Acadia, Yosemite, Joshua Tree, and other parks have web pages dedicated to helping people plan climbing trips and book camping and recreation fees and permits to access these climbs and areas. The new suggested policy would destroy some of the most iconic climbs and areas in our country and restrict access and the desire to recreate in these areas. The new policy would be better implemented if consideration, comment, and involvement was met by local and national climbing organizations. The NPS and USFS would benefit greatly from involving these organizations as they have in the past to create safe and sustainable climbing practices and policies in the future.

The main takeaway from this letter would be for the NPS and USFS to reassess this proposal and work cooperatively with climbers and climbing organizations big and small to create a policy based on safety and respect for not only these beautiful areas climbers and agencies both love, but for the history of climbing in our country.

Thank you for your time and consideration.