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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To whom it may concern,

I'm writing to express my opposition to this policy proposal as a long-time mountain guide, search-and-rescue worker, and member of the climbing community. These policies would disrupt a decades-long collaboration between land managers, climbers, and guide services, and leave in its place a dysfunctional and dangerous system overly dependent on bureaucracy and willfully ignorant of community resources and experience. To put it simply, safe climbing without fixed anchors - from bolts to pitons to slung trees - is impossible. I've worked as a guide for seven years in North Cascades and Mount Rainier National Parks as well as the National Forests of Washington State, and have seen firsthand the importance of fixed anchors in ensuring the safety of guides, clients, and independent climbers. The anchors have been maintained and monitored in a responsible, minimalistic, and respectful way by this community for decades; nothing about the new policies would improve this situation, and could only muddy the waters, slow the replacement of dangerously outdated existing anchors, and endanger wilderness users by discouraging the anchors that are essential to navigating this part of our public land safely. To be blunt, if we as a community are not able to evaluate and replace anchors as we have been for years, people will die. It's happened before (see the removal of the rappel station bolts off Forbidden Peak in NCNP, and the preventable rockfall death that followed, as just one example). Like it or not, climbers of various experience levels and abilities are accustomed to recreating on public land, and are accustomed to the use of fixed anchors. Removing these or blocking their maintenance would be severely impactful on the personal safety of individuals in the parks.

In addition, the economic impact that this proposal would have on the NFS and small businesses - not just guide services and equipment rentals, but also restaurants and other services in the rural areas that climbers and wilderness users frequent - would be hard to overstate. It may not seem like it at first glance, but these proposals would have the effect of essentially banning technical climbing - an accepted use of wilderness areas for decades - from NFS land. As a result, NFS - managed wilderness would certainly see a decrease in visitation, support, and revenue from the climbing community; the surrounding ecosystems of the parks would likewise suffer.

These proposals concerning fixed anchors in wilderness are ill-conceived for the aforementioned reasons, but above all they are simply unnecessary. No one is hiking power drills and bags of bolts deep into wilderness areas to grid-bolt face climbs. It just doesn't happen (and it likely never will) for pure logistical reasons; it also doesn't happen because that doesn't align with the climbing community's values. This is a user group deeply concerned with conservation, respectful of wilderness, and heavily invested in responsible anchor management with the boon of decades of communal experience and mentorship. Please don't take that away.

Sincerely,

Taylor Bickford