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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service Officials,

I am writing to express my concerns and provide comments regarding the proposed Wilderness Climbing Policies. As an avid climber, I understand the importance of preserving Wilderness character while ensuring the safety and enjoyment of climbers. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective on this matter.

I have carefully considered the proposed policies and would like to suggest improvements rather than simply opposing them outright. Fixed anchors play a crucial role in climbers' safety systems and are not prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Following existing climbing policies that have allowed judicious use of fixed anchors for over half a century is essential for protecting Wilderness character and facilitating primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing.

I find it unreasonable for federal agencies to introduce new guidance policies prohibiting Wilderness climbing anchors nationwide, especially when fixed anchors have been allowed, managed, and authorized for decades. Prohibiting fixed anchors could create safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of these anchors, which is a responsibility undertaken by the climbing community. Critical safety decisions often require immediate action, and any authorization process should not impede those decisions. It is crucial to manage fixed anchor maintenance in a way that encourages safe anchor replacement without risking the removal of climbing routes.

Moreover, prohibiting fixed anchors may obstruct the appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Land managers should allow climbers to explore Wilderness in a manner that permits in-the-moment decisions necessary when navigating complex vertical terrain. Restricting fixed anchors could threaten America's rich climbing legacy and erase some of the world's greatest climbing achievements. Climbing management policies should aim to protect existing routes from removal.

For USFS Comments Only:

Restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will create confusion amongst land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

I urge the USFS to reconsider the proposed policies and work collaboratively with the climbing community to develop solutions that balance safety, environmental conservation, and the rich climbing heritage that our country holds. I appreciate your attention to this matter and the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

Sincerely,

Zach Swart