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Comments: I am very concerned about the U.S. Forest Service's proposal to change their rules about fixed anchors and equipment.

My wife and I are avid climbers. We have been climbing for over a decade, and have learned from a generation of climbers who came before us how to climb with respect for the land we are so lucky to have access to. My wife and I have taught many other people in the same fashion as those that taught us: to honor the experience of being outdoors, to honor the wilderness and ecosystems we enter, and to climb with safely.

Climbers have tremendous respect for the environments in which - and on which - we climb. All our climbing techniques and methods of protecting ourselves are made to minimize impact on the rock. We do this for a very obvious reason: if we damaged climbing routes each time we climbed, we would very quickly and irrecoverably destroy the sport we loved.

A central ethos to climbing is to have reverence for the wild place you are engaging with. This is why, if you go to any popular climbing cliff, you will very likely see: well-maintained trails made by and for climbers, which no one but climbers may ever use because of their remote location; climbers carefully maintaining fixed and installed protective equipment for the benefit of the hundreds or thousands of fellow climbers who will use it in the future; and, if you can find any, fixed and installed equipment that is virtually impossible to see from the ground, unless you know exactly where to look, and what to look for.

The fixed and installed equipment in climbing areas is expertly installed and maintained. So much so, that when a small diameter hole is drilled into rock in which a piece of permanent protective equipment is placed, that will be the only time the rock or surrounding environment needs to be modified - maybe forever. The hardware, if it wears out (less likely these days with stainless steel and even titanium components), can be replaced using the same small hole in the rock. This fixed hardware is placed there so that climbers do not choose to use more impactful methods of protection - for example, using and unwittingly damaging living tree trunks at the top of a cliff to establish an anchor or rappel station, or wrapping a rope or sling around a boulder, slowly abrading it away over time. Fixed protective equipment is there to minimize our impact, and I believe it has no effect on other visitors' ability to access and enjoy the land. I would even wager that you would have a very hard time finding a park visitor who has even noticed the existence of such equipment, much less been negatively impacted by it.

In conclusion, I wish to implore the U.S. Forest Service to see the climbing community as a large, integral, passionate part of its constituency. Climbers are part of the U.S. Forest Service, just as much as the U.S. Forest Service is a part of climbing. The U.S. Forest Service exists so that we can be outdoors, in the beauty of nature, respectfully accessing what it has to offer us. Climbing is done around the world as a way to engage deeply with nature, and to have the experience of being part of the land on which we live.

Thank you,
Adam Leighton