

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/22/2024 5:28:08 AM

First name: Matthew

Last name: New

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service,

Please ignore the previous response from apparently me, my partner didn't realize that the "enter" key would submit the form and not create a new line. She's not a climber, but certainly an amateur stand-up comedian with mixed results. Here's my response:

I write to you as a seasoned rock climber, having grown up in the majestic Rockies and traveled extensively across the United States to pursue my passion for climbing. The essence of my journey has been harmoniously intertwined with the landscapes and the wilderness areas that your agency so diligently stewards. It is in this context, appreciating the delicate balance your work requires between caring for the land and serving the people, that I wish to discuss the issue of fixed anchors in wilderness climbing.

Fixed anchors are not just a part of our equipment; they are a critical component of our safety system. I believe they should not be classified as prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. The climbing community has responsibly used fixed anchors for over half a century, adhering to policies that judiciously balance the preservation of wilderness character with the necessity of primitive and unconfined climbing experiences.

It is concerning that federal agencies might consider new policies that would prohibit wilderness climbing anchors nationwide, especially given their longstanding acceptance, management, and authorization. Such a shift not only disregards decades of established practice but also overlooks the essential role these anchors play in climber safety.

The prohibition of fixed anchors poses significant safety risks. It impedes the routine maintenance of these anchors, a task often undertaken by climbers themselves. In the precarious and unpredictable world of climbing, decisions regarding safety must be made swiftly. Any authorization process should not hinder these critical, on-the-spot decisions. We need a management approach that promotes the safe replacement of anchors without risking the removal of established climbing routes.

fixed anchors play a pivotal role in ensuring the safety of climbers, especially in challenging and unpredictable terrains. These fixed anchors are essential for creating secure points of attachment, which are vital for protecting climbers from falls. Without these anchors, climbers would have to rely on natural features like rock cracks or trees, which are often less reliable and can vary greatly in stability. Bolts and pitons provide a standardized, dependable means of protection, reducing the risk of accidents and fatalities. They are particularly crucial in routes where natural protection is sparse or non-existent. This consistency in safety standards is not only beneficial for climbers but also essential for rescue operations, allowing for quicker and safer responses in emergencies. Additionally, fixed anchors enable climbers to undertake routes that would otherwise be deemed too risky, thus expanding the scope of safe climbing opportunities.

From an environmental perspective, the practice of building anchors with fixed hardware significantly reduces the impact on natural landscapes compared to using natural features like trees or rock outcroppings. Attaching ropes or gear directly to trees, for instance, can cause damage to the bark and underlying tissue, affecting the tree's health and potentially leading to long-term ecological consequences. Similarly, frequent use of natural rock features for building anchors can lead to erosion and alteration of the rock formations. In contrast, the use of pitons and bolts for building anchors concentrates the wear and tear on these artificial points, thereby minimizing the repeated physical impact on the natural environment. This approach is important in preserving the integrity of

natural climbing sites, ensuring that these areas remain undisturbed and retain their natural beauty for future generations of climbers and nature enthusiasts. Therefore, building anchors with pitons and bolts is a practice that serves the dual purpose of enhancing safety for climbers and protecting the natural environments where climbing takes place.

Moreover, forbidding fixed anchors limits the exploration of wilderness areas in a manner befitting the climbing community. The nature of climbing requires the freedom to make immediate decisions in complex vertical terrains. This freedom is essential for safely navigating and appreciating the wilderness.

The impact of prohibiting fixed anchors extends beyond immediate safety concerns. It threatens America's rich climbing legacy and risks erasing some of the world's most significant climbing achievements. Climbing management policies should be designed to protect existing routes from removal, thus preserving this integral part of our cultural heritage.

Lastly, restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" in non-wilderness lands poses practical challenges. Such restrictions are difficult to enforce and can lead to confusion among both land managers and climbers. Non-wilderness climbing policies should continue to allow new anchors, barring specific analyses that demonstrate a need to restrict climbing to protect cultural and natural resources.

In conclusion, I advocate for policies that recognize the historical and ongoing role of fixed anchors in wilderness climbing. Such policies should support the safety, exploration, and legacy of climbing while maintaining the integrity and beauty of our wilderness areas. I trust that the Forest Service, with its deep commitment to both land stewardship and public service, will consider these perspectives in shaping future climbing management policies.

Sincerely,