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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am an artist, advocate, and defender of Wilderness as a human ideal and a habitat for more-than-human species. In 2014, I launched a project to draw every glacier in Montana to raise awareness about the importance of alpine wilderness glaciers in the Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystems. With over 20 years of exploring and advocating for wilderness, I believe the current draft policy concerning fixed anchors in wilderness areas can be improved and in its current draft does harm to wilderness access, advocacy, and safety. Sensible regulation in the wilderness makes sense, but an outright ban goes against decades of sensible American wilderness tradition where fixed anchors have been permitted by the Wilderness Act of 1964. Climbing, canyoneering, and mountaineering are some of America's great wilderness traditions. These traditions are crucial to introducing wilderness to new people and younger generations that can continue to protect America's wilderness legacy. Climbing is a great way to introduce urban and underprivileged kids to the idea of wilderness because of the community role of the climbing gym - not everyone can afford a horse, long trips, or expensive backpacking gear to explore the wilderness. Without wilderness climbing and canyoneering, we lose the chance to reach these kids and get them on board as supporters of wilderness protection. Safety becomes a life-threatening issue without fixed anchors and can inhibit the recreationist's need to make safety decisions. Without fixed anchors, there is more risk of increased environmental degradation as recreationists will be forced to set up temporary anchors in fragile terrain. Local climbers and climbing organizations take pride in ensuring the best practices of anchor placement, safety, and sustainability. Wilderness climbing in America is unique; there is no other place like it on the planet, and we need to protect the historic canyoneering and climbing routes that define wilderness in America. Furthermore, banning new routes or replacing old anchors for safety is unenforceable and creates confusing rules for recreationists and land managers. The policy should allow for new routes and anchors unless they are proven to affect cultural and natural resources. However, the climbing and canyoneering community already take seriously the protection of natural and cultural resources in evidence by seasonal closures of climbing routes to protect nesting birds of prey in Southern Arizona where I climb. Climbers, canyoneers, and mountaineers are sincere, committed wilderness explorers and advocates. The current draft policy as written is detrimental to the future health and protection of wilderness, and I support revisions to the draft that protect fixed anchors and reflect the bipartisan Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act and America's Outdoor Recreation Act.