

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/25/2024 9:21:49 PM

First name: Jacob

Last name: Sellinger

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Bolting Ban Response

While well intentioned, I think there is much to be learned from the heaviest users of wilderness spaces for climbing about how to best regulate these special places for the purposes of preservation and recreation. I believe that the focus of legislation around regulating installments should focus on harm reduction, both to the environment and to recreational users alike. I believe one of the most important things for regulators to keep in perspective with any decision is that use among the public is not likely to decrease based off of a ban or other punitive regulation. My perspective is that of an avid recreational user of public lands and from my time working in the North Cascades and around the Tahoe basin as a mountain guide.

In response to banning permanent installments such as bolts and fixed slings, I believe that Mount Shuksan in North Cascades National Park provides a perfect example of why a ban would be negative for the community, Park Service, and environment. Mount Shuksan is a mountain used by both recreational climbers and guiding services constantly through the summer alpine season. For years, climbers and guides have been advocating for a better descent route off the peak. The current situation is that the Park will not allow fixed installments (bolts) to be installed to facilitate rappel station along the peaks standard descent gully. This bowling alley like gully is loose and funnels softball to car sized blocks down the summit pyramid. However, because of the bolting ban, there are myriad rappel/belay stations established on both sides of the gully, confusing many first time climbers and incidentally encouraging them to criss cross the feature searching for safe and reliable point to attach themselves to the mountain. Climbers who end up in an area where they don't find an established sling anchor will then create another anchor due to the confusion and circumstances in which they find themselves. If instead of the Park Service enforcing rules to not allow bolts, we partnered together to create a safe, established set of anchors, we could both decrease the hazard of the route, the visual impact of left behind gear, and the amount of trash left in the high mountains. These all seem to, in the end, be the goals of the set forth regulation.

Another benefit to creating more reliable anchors is the ability to decrease the strain on emergency resources. An accident at the summit of Mount Shuksan creates a strain on the other climbers on the mountain, the Park Service, and local first responders. A series of well placed anchors has the power to encourage climbers to follow safer, more well established paths and decrease the frequency of accidents. Here is one example of an accident report relating to the hazards of the summit pyramid of Mount Shuksan:

<https://publications.americanalpineclub.org/articles/13199307401/Falling-Rock-Dislodged-By-Climber-Washington-Mount-Shuksan-Fisher-Chimneys>

The summit of Mount Shuksan is not a place where climbers or guides can haphazardly place bolts due to the remoteness and commitment required to bring the necessary gear to place an installment. The climbing community voraciously self regulates and has never hesitated to pull a bolt that is out of place or unnecessary. In wilderness areas, partnership and harm reduction through the establishment of known, safe, and reliable anchors can work to meet all of the goals of the invested parties. Just like trail networks and established campsites are used to minimize impacts in forests, parks, and wilderness areas around the country, safe anchors can play a similar role.

Mount Shuksan is an example of an area that could benefit from a change in regulation, but could be substituted with any number of other areas, such as the Tetons, the Wind River Range, Yosemite, Kings Canyon, and more.

Wilderness climbing regulation is not going away anytime soon, nor is the increasing traffic we are seeing from the public. Instead of trying to discourage the use of these area, we ought to seek ways to create safe passage

for the users who will be there anyway and avoid unnecessary accidents that may result from a narrow minded focus on perceived impacts from a small number of users in remote areas.