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Comments: I am writing to express my grave concern that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has issued proposed policies governing rock climbing in the designated Wildernesses that elevate recreation above wilderness protection and permanently scar and degrade Wilderness through the installation of fixed climbing anchors. Clearly, the USFS has listened too closely to some climbers and lobbyists for the trillion dollar a year outdoor recreation industry, and not enough to wilderness advocates.

Rock climbing without permanent fixed anchors is generally compatible with wilderness preservation. Using removable protection like slings and chocks is also generally compatible. But permanent fixed climbing anchors, like bolts and pitons permanently pounded into Wilderness rock faces, diminish an area's wild character. Not only are such installations lasting signs of human development, but they also attract and concentrate use-at great expense to native plants and animals for whom Wilderness is often a last, safe refuge.

Contrary to the assertions of some climbers who oppose maintaining wilderness character, climbing in designated Wilderness areas will not come to an end without permanent fixed anchors-but defacing rock and adjacent areas will. Climbing in Wilderness existed long before modern methods of placing fixed anchors became prevalent and increased the ability of climbers to climb thus far virtually impossible "routes." Along with the increased access provided by modern technology, use has significantly increased-so has damage to the rock and adjacent areas.

Not only that, but permanent fixed anchor use and maintenance in Wilderness is-and always has been-prohibited by the Wilderness Act's ban on installations. Nonetheless, some climbing organizations champion a non-existing extant right to their installations in Wilderness, at the expense of Wilderness itself, by elevating fixed anchor climbing above existing prohibitions on activities far less permanent.

I urge the USFS to protect Wilderness from defacement by upholding the Wilderness Act to keep fixed anchors out of Wilderness.