

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/25/2024 4:04:28 PM

First name: William

Last name: McConaughy

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to you about my concern over the new 'FSM 2355 Climbing Opportunities' directive that would classify future and existing fixed anchors as prohibited installations in Forest Service Wilderness areas. As a climber, I worry about the safety implications of anchor removal when I'm in the wilderness. If fixed anchors are removed on existing climbs, how can climbers safely navigate in the wilderness without endangering themselves? Wilderness first responders rely on fixed anchors to reach stranded people in steep/rugged areas. Will they be able to perform their job safely if fixed anchors are removed? Fixed anchors are essential for safety in climbing. If fixed anchors are considered 'installations' as described in the Wilderness Act, why have they been allowable since 1964?

As for the restriction of new climbing routes to "existing climbing opportunities" it seems like an unfair blanket statement that is hard to define and hard to enforce. Opportunities for new climbing routes shouldn't be altogether discouraged unless analyses show that climbing there adversely affects natural or cultural resources.

I do realize that different user groups in the outdoors have an impact on the land that we all enjoy. But climbers AND local climbing advocacy groups put forth a huge effort to counteract what impact we have through constant stewardship and community events. Where I live, in southern Arizona, I spend much of my time climbing on Mt Lemmon and Cochise Stronghold (both in the Coronado National Forest). Several times throughout the year, the Climbing Association of Southern Arizona (CASA) hosts events where climbers volunteer to clean up the often littered highway and other high use tourist areas (like Windy Point) so that we can ALL enjoy these wonderful outdoor spaces.

Thank you for taking the time to read these comments. I hope you see that climber's like myself really do care about our precious wilderness areas and want to see them cared for as well. The implications of the fixed anchor prohibition seems a bit threatening from a climber's perspective. Maybe there's some solution that both Forest Service and Climber's alike can find acceptable for each other's needs.