

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/26/2024 8:22:28 PM

First name: Robert

Last name: Olsztyn

Organization:

Title:

Comments: As a climber, I want to ensure the safe and responsible use of fixed anchors in Wilderness/national forests remains available to the climbing community. I respect and advocate for the responsible use of Wilderness areas and believe that fixed anchors can be a component of a sustainable Wilderness experience.

Fixed anchors are an essential piece of climbers' safety system and are not prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Prohibiting fixed anchors will create safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of fixed anchors, a responsibility undertaken by the climbing community. Critical safety decisions often must be made in the moment and any authorization process should not impede those decisions. I've personally used existing slings and had to add some my own for safe retreat from a 1000-foot climbing route. Had those existing slings not been there, our retreat could have been much different - deadly even. Fixed anchor maintenance needs to be managed in a way that incentivizes safe anchor replacement and does not risk the removal of climbing routes.

Land managers need to allow climbers to explore Wilderness in a way that permits in-the-moment decisions that are necessary when navigating complex vertical terrain.

Prohibiting fixed anchors will threaten America's rich climbing legacy and could erase some of the world's greatest climbing achievements, as well as have a chilling effect on the future of outdoor climbing. Climbing management policy needs to protect existing routes from removal.

Additionally, the last several years has proven that the chronically underfunded NPS and USFS does not have the resources to regularly empty trash cans and manage bathroom facilities, let alone navigate complex vertical environments to inspect and/or remove climbing anchors. The proposal, if passed, would create an unnecessary burden on a process that has been successfully self-managed by the climbing community and advocacy organizations like the American Alpine Club and the Access Fund (and dozens of local climbing coalitions) for generations. Requiring applications and federal inspection of these installations would likely result and a multi-year (indefinite?) backlog that would effectively block safe management of climbing anchors. Restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will create confusion amongst land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

Please revise your climbing guidance to reflect the practice and precedent of the last 60+ years-that fixed anchors for climbing can be used, replaced, and maintained in designated Wilderness/national forest areas.