

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/27/2024 12:46:05 PM

First name: Jeff

Last name: Neal

Organization:

Title:

Comments: As a climber of 26 years, I have the following comments on the draft policies the NPS and USFS are considering for adoption.

First off, anchors are a VERY important piece of safety for a climbers experience. Without a reliable, solid, maintained anchor system, a climbers risk of injury or death dramatically increases. Fixed anchors are not 'prohibited installations' under the Wilderness Act, and to suddenly create new guidance policies prohibiting Wilderness climbing anchors across the country, when they have been allowed, managed, and authorized for decades is unreasonable.

Prohibiting fixed anchors by imposing unnecessary obstacles to regular maintenance creates huge safety concerns.

In my 26 years, I have seen the red tape of the USFS in action with regard to new climbing routes in the Daniel Boone Nation Forest, particularly the Red River Gorge area. In 26 years, nothing has happened, despite the fact that climbers and the local climber coalition have done a lot on their part with respecting closures, volunteering to help the USFS with projects, and getting the word out to climbers so that ALL might help in working WITH the USFS.

Climbers and climbing organizations are generally well organized, respectful of the land and nature, and have a history of taking care of maintaining climbing routes.

Prohibiting fixed anchors is an obstruction to the appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Land managers need to allow climbers to explore Wilderness areas in a way that permits in the moment decisions that are necessary when navigating complex vertical terrain.

Lastly, I cannot refrain from falling back on the age old statement that, as a tax paying citizen of 45+ years, I feel I have a right to enjoy the public lands I have in a small way helped to fund.

I would like to be able to do so in a safe manner. By passing the proposed policies, I feel that my right to enjoy Wilderness areas in the ways that bring me joy, would have serious and unnecessary safety risks added to the experience.

Restricting net route development to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will lead to 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.