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Organization:

Title:

Comments: As operators of a USDA Concession and avid nature enthusiasts we have seen the pros and cons of climbing and other forms of unregulated recreation. Our daughter is an avid climber. Please note that the following concerns and suggestions are coming from our best intentions and support for Recreation, Nature, and the General Public within the National Forests.

Concerns:

- Emergency Services can be hours away from popular climbing areas, this puts an incredible strain on operators of facilities and local services. Especially when routes are unidentified, remote, difficult to access.
- We have received multiple reports that the ties/anchors/chains/etc in the cliff face IN OUR AREA are outdated, unsafe, and downright dangerous from multiple climbers.
- There are protected species of flora and fauna surrounding and inhabiting the cliffs in our area: Ozark Big-Eared Bats, Lichen, Lady's Slippers, Mountain Lions, etc. We have witnessed incredibly disturbing behavior that lacks regard for precious species: damage to foliage, moss/lichen, unsanctioned clearing of foliage with chainsaws/equipment which is disturbing to wildlife and the general public, and the creation of new routes near/on sensitive habitats.
- Climbers have created "convenient" accesses to climbing routes off maintained trails creating erosion issues and damage to flora/fauna.
- We see the impact of no regulation daily, especially by individuals endeavoring to create guidebooks or repeat visitors/groups. These individuals "create" new routes along the cliff faces with no regard to safety, concern for protected species, regard for the integrity and placement of fixed equipment, and disregard for the general public's enjoyment of the facility. We have witnessed the destruction of (remote/non-maintained) waterfalls and local areas of interest due to guidebooks, authors, social media influencers, etc not taking responsibility for the impact on publicity and increased traffic.
- We have had complaints from day users and cabin/campground guests regarding noise, obstruction on trails, and questionable behavior. (using chainsaws/loud equipment on busy days, public drinking, public urination, placing fixed equipment visible to photographers and general public, leaving ropes/equipment/supplies to obstruct popular narrow hiking trails, loud obnoxious behavior, disregard of facility rules including closing times, parking, campground rules, exceeding guest limits per site, after hour loud parties, accessing restricted areas, and general disorderly conduct.)

Suggestions:

- Safety procedures and collaboration with emergency services needs to be further developed and supported for remote locations regarding the high risk activity.
- A thorough assessment of the current fixed equipment/routes, and removal or replacement needs to be determined and implemented.
- Environmental Assessments would be beneficial to identify protected flora and fauna that are impacted by rock climbing and help determine appropriate routes that limit the impact on nature and the general public.
- Climbing routes and potential access routes to the base of the cliffs needs to be determined (and developed) prior to resuming climbing in our area in particular. Erosion mitigation and safety routes for emergency services developed.
- Public awareness, signage, development and funding needs to be acquired and all projects accomplished. A collaboration with FS officials/NPO's/and climbing volunteers needs to be established for popular areas to fund/implement projects such as those developed for horse trails, hiking trails, biking trails, etc.

We respect the hard work and dedication the NPO's and volunteers do in our area to maintain trails and promote public awareness (supported by publishing maps, merchandise, donations, FS organization which in turn provides the public with crucial information and local maintenance/support.)

We are advocates of all forms of recreation and enjoyment of the National Forest(s)/Public Lands. We support sustainable, responsible, and safe recreation and do everything within our power to help facilitate it. We have witnessed the consequences of lack of oversight in particular arenas and also the benefits of close organization/collaboration/oversight with the Forest Service/businesses/and local NPO's and volunteers. We fully support the proposed measures and offer our assistance in the future to help promote and ensure sustainable climbing recreation.