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Comments: I spend a lot of time in Wilderness areas. I am a huge proponent of Wilderness areas being kept as pristine as possible. I encourage the heeding of current policies and restrictions including any mechanized devices. I am happy to educate folks when I see rules that are not being followed.

The result of these proposals would apply a blanket ban on anchor placement and maintenance. Doing this will most certainly cause many more injuries and fatalities within the sport of rock climbing as well as increased damage to our Wilderness areas. The sport has seen a significant increase in participants over the last decade and it continues to grow. Creating policies around how to make the sport safer and how to protect our land is the conversation we need to have now. The current proposed policies are not the answer. Passing these policies would be hasty when this conversation deserves a lot more critical thinking and a better solution. Some key points to consider are:

Aging hardware makes climbing routes and descents less safe, which causes more accidents. Maintenance of existing anchors is very important to the safety of climbers and is labor intensive to perform. The proposed directives will make existing routes more hazardous by restricting maintenance of bolts and anchors.

Bolts and fixed rappel stations prevent resource degradation in delicate alpine environments. These types of planned descent routes not only avoid vegetation damage (rappelling from trees, scrambling through fragile sections of alpine plants, etc.) but also create descent options that reduce rockfall hazards, minimize chances of climbers getting ropes stuck on descents, and avoid dangerous situations and costly rescue operations. Bolted anchors tend to reduce trampling and social trail creation in delicate alpine environments by directing all climbers to a single location on durable rock surfaces instead of wandering around to assess descent options.

Rappelling is frequently the primary cause of death in climbing accidents. When climbers rappel, they rely completely on an anchor, and anchor failure during rappelling often results in death. Prohibiting the maintenance of anchors or any placement of bolted anchors increases use of unreliable natural features that greatly increase the risk of anchor failure and impacts on vegetation.

On wilderness routes, bolts are already placed sparingly. In situations where no removable gear can be placed, bolts are placed to prevent catastrophic falls. Rappelling from some type of fixed anchors is often the only option for climbers to safely retreat from routes without SAR rescue, for example during inclement weather. Prohibiting these placements will lead to potential for more catastrophic falls in the wilderness and more SAR calls. Furthermore, SAR teams rely on fixed anchors to perform rescue operations. Not permitting fixed anchors will jeopardize SAR rescue operations and unnecessarily endanger the lives of rescuers.

Please consider a more in depth look at this situation so we can come to a solution that is in the best interest of our Wilderness and for the thousands of people who recreate as rock climbers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.