

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/27/2024 10:06:32 PM

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Comments: I have been regularly rock climbing since 2009, primarily in Arizona and Colorado, including in Wilderness areas such as the Pusch Ridge Wilderness Area.

The new draft regulations restricting the use of fixed anchors in Wilderness areas concern me because they will put the safety of climbers at risk, and furthermore undermine the spirit of the Wilderness Act and what it is designed to protect.

As climbers, fixed anchors are essential pieces of our safety system that allow us to safely and sustainably access vertical terrain. Without fixed anchors, many of the wildest and most inspiring places in America would become inaccessible to the public.

Forcing climbers to wait on receiving special permission to place or replace anchors will de facto restrict access to unique vantage points of special landscapes, or force climbers to be unsafe in reaching these places - perhaps without their knowledge if they are depending on anchors that are too old and need replacing but have not yet been approved.

I urge you not to adopt these regulations, which would represent a novel interpretation of the Wilderness Act in classifying anchors as installation, and would undermine the spirit of the act in restricting recreation by people balancing judgement and ethics to have a minimal impact on the landscape already.

Climbers have been utilizing and advocating for the responsible and thoughtful use of fixed anchors (including pitons, slings, and bolts) in what are now designated Wilderness areas since before the passing of the Wilderness Act in 1964. Histories collected by the American Alpine Club over the past century illustrate this point (view some of them at https://americanalpineclub.org/news/2024/1/24/three-climbs-from-the-historic-roots-of-wilderness-climbing?mc_cid=e0fbbd55f2&mc_eid=1da13d4bed). In these accounts, legends of the pursuit grapple explicitly with the ethics and safety requirements. Since then, recreation, including climbing, has been a major tenet of what the Wilderness Act aims to protect.

Modern climbers like me value the natural aspect of Wilderness areas, and climbing anchors, which are unobtrusive, enhance the ability of climbers to safely and ethically access unique perspective of these unique and valuable lands, in a way consistent with the values of the Wilderness Act.

Those of us who partake in this opportunity become staunch advocates for the continued protection of such special landscapes.

The judicious use of climbing anchors should not be considered installations that would require special regulation and permission, and would in effect inhibit climbing in wilderness in a safe manner.