

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/29/2024 4:04:04 PM

First name: Nicola

Last name: Nicolai

Organization:

Title:

Comments: The proposed policies governing rock climbing in the Wilderness that the USFS has issued elevate recreation above wilderness protection and permanently scar and degrade Wilderness through the installation of fixed climbing anchors. The Wilderness Act prohibits installations and structures like permanent fixed climbing anchors in order to protect the areas' wild character. Fixed climbing anchors must not be allowed in Wilderness.

The Wilderness Act's strict prohibitions, including its prohibition on installations, cannot be overcome by a desire to facilitate or enhance a particular form of recreation, and the narrow administrative exception for installations does not extend to the general public seeking to create developed recreational activities in Wilderness. The agency's primary duty is to protect Wilderness in its natural, untrammeled state, and the Wilderness Act's ban on installations can only be overcome in rare administrative circumstances where the installation is necessary to protect Wilderness in its natural, untrammeled state.

Agencies have no duty to develop Wilderness to provide "opportunities for primitive recreation." Wilderness, by its very existence, provides these opportunities-the agencies need only to protect the Wilderness according to the provisions of the Wilderness Act to safeguard the opportunity.

Climbing without permanent fixed anchors is generally compatible with wilderness preservation. While it may be true that fewer people will climb certain routes in Wilderness if they don't have fixed bolts or other permanently-installed protection, natural limits on use is not a bad thing when it comes to wilderness protection, particularly with the recent explosion of outdoor recreation uses in Wilderness. For those climbers seeking developed climbing opportunities, there are ample permanently bolted climbs outside of Wilderness.

Wilderness is an endangered landscape. Less than 3 percent of land in the Lower 48 is protected as Wilderness, and it is under threat, including from rapidly escalating recreation pressures. Any specific proposals for permanent fixed anchor installations in Wilderness must be subjected to public notice and an opportunity for public comment pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act.

Thank you.