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Comments: To Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for being willing to receive broad input on this important issue!

I have been rock climbing in the US and abroad for 50 years, beginning when I was 13 at the Shawangunks in NY. At that time, before removable passive and active protection devices were available, we used pitons (metal pegs pounded into the cracks) for protection. As it was noted that removal and replacement of pitons damaged the rock, these were left in for others to use and to preserve the rock as much as possible for future generations. These were next to invisible to hikers and naturalists as they were out of their view for the most part and made the climbing and descending safer for the few participants in the 1970's.

Over time pitons became almost obsolete, as removable passive and active protection devices came along, but there are some climbs without cracks that are impossible to protect without bolts. These anchors make these climbs safer for the climber and allow for controlled safe descent should weather move in, should an accident occur, or the climb be too difficult for the climbers to ascend. I disagree that these fixed anchors "have a significant effect on wilderness character" as they are almost invisible to the wilderness explorer and even as a climber, I often have difficulty finding them.

I have needed to use these anchors to safely descend when storms moved in, to retreat from hazardous conditions, (impending rockfall or precarious cornices) and to rescue other climbers. Removing these anchors will damage the rock more and will make climbing much more dangerous - leading to the need for more costly rescues putting rescuers and climbers at further risk.

A comparison could be made to trail markers, signs, blazes or cairns that help hikers find their way and safely get out of the wilderness if storms move in, should an accident occur, or the hike be too difficult for the hikers to accomplish. One could posit that these trail markers, signs, blazes or cairns have a significant effect on wilderness character and should be removed. Should we remove all trail markers, signs, blazes or cairns to preserve the pristine wilderness at the expense of human safety?

Please allow the preservation of climbing anchors in the wild for the safety of United States climbers who now number 10.35 million per Statista Research Department, published Nov 7, 2023, as well as international climbers who travel here to climb. I have climbed throughout the world and these permanent anchors are standard world-wide. These anchors should be placed by experts as unobtrusively as possible to save the NPS and USFS from performing more rescues, and decreasing the morbidity and mortality of climbers who have accidents from human error or natural events, (rockfall, avalanches, lightning, etc).

Thank you for your consideration!

Respectfully,

Winston J. Warme, MD