

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/29/2024 6:11:31 PM

First name: Kim

Last name: Porter

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for accepting my comments regarding the USFS's proposed policies governing rock climbing in designated Wilderness areas. I am adamantly opposed to policies which place recreation above legally designated wilderness protection bestowed by Congress and the laws which govern them. These policies would permit practices that would violate Wilderness protection laws and would significantly degrade Wilderness through the installation of fixed climbing anchors.

Rock climbing without permanent fixed anchors is generally compatible with wilderness preservation. Using removable protection like slings and chocks is also generally compatible. But permanent fixed climbing anchors, like bolts and pitons permanently pounded into Wilderness rock faces, diminish an area's wild character. Not only are such installations lasting signs of human development, but they also attract and concentrate use-at great expense to native plants and animals for whom Wilderness is often a last, safe refuge.

Contrary to the assertions of some climbers who oppose maintaining wilderness character, climbing in designated Wilderness areas will not come to an end without permanent fixed anchors-but defacing rock and adjacent areas will. Climbing in Wilderness existed long before modern methods of placing fixed anchors became prevalent and increased the ability of climbers to climb thus far virtually impossible "routes." Along with the increased access provided by modern technology, use has significantly increased-so has damage to the rock and adjacent areas.

Not only that, but permanent fixed anchor use and maintenance in Wilderness is-and always has been-prohibited by the Wilderness Act's ban on installations. Nonetheless, some climbing organizations champion a non-existing extant right to their installations in Wilderness, at the expense of Wilderness itself, by elevating fixed anchor climbing above existing prohibitions on activities far less permanent. However, this is not your mandate.

The USFS must reject the noise from some climbers and lobbyists and a minority of loud voices in the outdoor recreation industry, and listen to wilderness advocates and the law. For all of the reasons above, you should reject the new policies that attempt to legalize the use of fixed anchors in Wilderness areas managed by the USFS and NPS.