

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/29/2024 6:28:10 PM

First name: Dick

Last name: KRESSER

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello,

As a both a regular visitor to many Wilderness location in Washington State and also an avid climber, I understand where the NPS and USFS might be concerned about the use of fixed anchors on popular climbing routes. To some, I see how it could see how the Wilderness Act could be construed to say bolts or other fixed protection are "permanent improvements". I do thank the NPS and USFS for doing their very best to interpret laws knowledgeably and fairly to prioritize conservation for our wild places. They truly are one of the gems of America and being the land agency overseeing policies is a difficult role.

I would encourage the land agencies to also not lose sight of the intent of the law, where land is "retaining its primeval character and influence", "where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." For the climbing community, fixed anchors are the linchpin in allowing visitors to that specific area, to explore the sheer cliff faces and canyon walls. Without fixed anchors, climbers have no way to safely explore these zones, to travel into these wild places, and recreate on public lands.

I understand the argument that many user groups are also not allowed to conduct their chosen means of recreation on Wilderness lands, such as motor sports, cyclists, or drones. But using expansion bolts, nylon slings, and pitons are a far cry from the mechanized tools of these groups I mentioned.

Similar to how a beautifully designed singletrack trail might cut right through a pristine old growth forest thick with moss in the Hoh River valley, non-mechanized fixed anchors also are way to encourage users to "stick to the trail". Instead of having users trampling all around a forest floor, a single footpath is provided for both conservation and safety. Why not also allow a route on the vertical planes of Wilderness areas as well as the horizontal ones? Fixed anchors on climbing routes is no different than a trail: both are relatively permanent improvements, but ones that have been deemed necessary for safe travel and are very low impact.

Climbers in America have generally held very passionate and supportive ethos surrounding conservation. The bolting issue on climbing routes has long been debated, and has mostly solidified in the past few decades that it is an acceptable practice where necessary but should be reserved for times where it is the only practical solution. I believe the draft policy to prohibit fixed anchors is abit akin to finding a problem when there isn't one there. Due to the nature of the terrain, the only individuals who would encounter a fixed anchor are the climbers who are using and relying on them. They in no part would detract from any other user group's experience in a Wilderness area and should be allowed to stay.

Thank you for the open comment period for public review.

Dick Kresser