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Organization:

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Comments: To the officials considering a change in fixed anchor management in wilderness,

I am a rock climber, a resident of the great American West, and a lover of wilderness, and I oppose the classification of fixed anchors as "prohibited installations." I was introduced to climbing about ten years ago, and the sport has since become my life's passion.

Seeking out powerful experiences in remote natural spaces has shaped my choices for most of my adult life. I have completed two "thru-hikes," walking 800 miles across the state of Arizona and 500 miles through the mountains of Colorado. I spent every day and night on the land, and I experienced the difference made by federal protections and designations. When I stepped into the Wilderness, I breathed a sigh of relief, and I believe the land did too. I feel a sense of belonging to Wilderness, and a duty to protect it.

Climbing has been recognized as a "legitimate and appropriate use of wilderness," and it should continue to be. My favorite type of climbing, "traditional," uses primarily removable anchors such as camming devices and nuts, in order to preserve minimally impacted terrain. However, fixed anchors (including bolts) are an essential part of even these climbs. They are necessary to protect climbers on areas of rock where removable anchors are impossible, and they are often needed to allow climbers to descend a route (routinely or under duress). When these bolts age, they need to be replaced. Prohibiting new fixed anchors in Wilderness or removing existing ones would upend climbers' ability to access many of our favorite areas.

Deeply impactful moments in my life have occurred while climbing in Wilderness. My friends and I have experienced a sense of exploration and accomplishment, and a feeling of connection to the land and its geology. The Forest Service manages Granite Mountain Wilderness in my state of Arizona, a place where I recently had one of the best climbing days of my life on a minimally impactful trad route from the 1970s. I hope that future climbers will have the opportunity to establish new classics as the sport progresses, while continuing to respect the history and spirit of wilderness. This place is just one of many USFS Wilderness areas in the West that I cherish hiking, climbing, and camping in.

Please continue to recognize climbers as a passionate and careful user group. As with any outdoor recreationalists, climbers have an impact on the wilderness just by virtue of entering it. However, I believe that problematic development can be addressed under the current regulations, without the need to turn the status quo on its head.

Thank you,

Tracy Paulsen