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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Land Managers,

I am writing to offer public comment on the US Forest Service Draft Guidance for Managing Wilderness Climbing.

I have been a climber at a high level for over 45 years, including doing big wall first ascents on El Capitan, and Half Dome in Yosemite, and pioneering new routes in the High Sierra, on Angel's Wings and The Citadel. I have also enjoyed a long career as a guide, serving as Chief Guide of the Yosemite Mountaineering School from 1981-1988. Today I run a youth serving non-profit, Gateway Mountain Center, which brings hundreds of youth from marginalized communities into the Sierra each year, mostly at our Donner Summit location. Hundreds of these youth of color are coming to the mountains for the first time, and enjoy rock climbing along with other mountain adventure experiences.

At Donner Summit, which is in the front country and not designated wilderness we are holders of a special use permit to conduct our educational activities including rock climbing. In our area, we are a part of a community of guides who collaborate on making sure fixed belay anchors are safe and maintained. Our location gets the highest snowfall volume in North America. Each spring after the snow melt runoff, it is imperative that belay anchors that are commonly used get inspected by the local guides who use them, and replaced if necessary. With the reductions in Forest Service personnel over the past years it is hard to imagine applying for permission to maintain safe anchors at popular climbing areas.

I am also very concerned with the draft proposals on Managing Wilderness Climbing. Specifically if fixed anchors for belaying and rappelling are considered "prohibited installations", as currently written, and if the replacement and upkeep of some of these anchors are subject to a Minimum Requirements Analysis, this will present a serious safety hazard for climbers. Some decisions just don't work by committee or regulatory statute. Climbers on first ascents and climbers and guides climbing and descending classic routes located in wilderness areas need to be able to make on the spot decisions on the use or replacement of fixed anchors.

The wilderness and environmental preservation ethic is very strong in the climbing community, and there is strong peer pressure to minimize fixed anchors as much as possible. This has worked well during the long, rich history of mountaineering in our wilderness areas.

I strongly urge reconsideration of the Draft Guidance for Managing Wilderness Climbing, to remove the prohibitions and unrealistic Minimum Requirement Analysis proposals so that climbers have the flexibility to assess the need to place or replace fixed anchors in wilderness and non-wilderness areas.

Peter Mayfield