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Comments: Dear USFS,

Thank you very much for all you do to protect and allow access to some of America's most beautiful natural areas. Be able to explore and appreciate these wilderness areas are indeed a real gift. I'm writing to you in concord with rock climbers around the world to request that you reverse your consideration to prohibit bolts and other fixed safety gear used by rock climbers and mountaineers in our country's parks.

Among the myriad reasons prohibiting the placement of new bolts and upkeep of existing bolts:

Fixed anchors are an essential piece of climbers' safety system and are not prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Following existing climbing policies that allow judicious use of fixed anchors for more than a half century will do more to protect Wilderness character while providing for primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing.

It is unreasonable for federal agencies to create new guidance policies prohibiting Wilderness climbing anchors across the country when they have allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades.

Prohibiting fixed anchors will create safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of fixed anchors, a responsibility undertaken by the climbing community. Critical safety decisions often must be made in the moment and any authorization process should not impede those decisions. Fixed anchor maintenance needs to be managed in a way that incentivizes safe anchor replacement and does not risk the removal of climbing routes.

Prohibiting fixed anchors obstructs appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Land managers need to allow climbers to explore Wilderness in a way that permits in-the-moment decisions that are necessary when navigating complex vertical terrain.

Prohibiting fixed anchors will threaten America's rich climbing legacy and could erase some of the world's greatest climbing achievements. Climbing management policy needs to protect existing routes from removal.

Restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will create confusion amongst land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

Other considerations for preserving access to climbing routes is the revenue generated by visiting climbers-not just climbers local to specific parks, but all those who visit from other states and countries. With close friends of mine who are wilderness first responders and rescuers, I also deeply worry about the safety of the men and women who risk their own lives to save others, as unmanaged bolts could endanger them in instances of search and rescue in otherwise inaccessible areas.

Thank you for reconsidering the prohibition and for understanding the immense importance of preserving safe and enjoyable access to all areas of our beautiful natural areas.

Sincerely,

Spencer Higgs