

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/29/2024 11:08:06 PM

First name: Josh

Last name: Cleveland

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear USFS -

Hope that your day is going well.

It was climbing that first brought me to Forest Service Land in California. The first time I set foot on Shuteye Ridge, I was there to try my luck (and maybe a bit of skill) at a climb called "Afternoon Nap" on the Big Sleep Dome. It was an incredible adventure shared with my partner. The only way to ascend the climb safely is to attach your rope to a set of fixed anchors as you ascend. It's the only way aside from free soloing and risking falling 1000 feet to your death. I'm immensely grateful for that experience and for the fixed bolts that allowed us to have it on that amazing spring day nearly 15 years ago. It went so well in fact that 4 years later, I chose the top of another climb on National Forest land with fixed protection to propose to that same partner, the woman who is now my wife.

Since that day we've been the incredibly fortunate beneficiaries of many climbs with fixed protection on USFS land. It has saved our lives both on the ascent - when we have fallen during difficult sequences and been arrested by quickdraws clipped to bolts - and in helping descend safely when weather turns or when a route just has no other reasonable way down.

I think there is a better option than restricting fixed anchors. Instead of essentially closing down hundreds of the most incredible climbing routes in the world - true classics that define recreation in our great country and bring people to our forests from across the globe - we should think about how we can make these experiences as low impact and safe as possible. No climber wants more bolts than are absolutely necessary. We're not into that overall. There have indeed been routes that have been bolted that shouldn't have been bolted (either too close to an existing route or in a dangerous area, etc.) and other climbers promptly remove the bolts. There is a long and deep history of self-regulation in the community. I would suggest we formalize that. Ask the climbing community to formalize systems for camouflaging anchors if desired or for maintaining existing routes and ensuring that the bolts are safe.

But 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 and will result in unsafe climbing situations. Some anchors will be eliminated altogether. Who will tell climbers that this has happened? How will you know until you get to where the old anchor used to be and can no longer reach the ground safely? Lucky climbers will be able to leave unsightly fixed gear to descend. Unlucky climbers will have to call for a costly, environmentally damaging rescue. Old anchors won't get replaced. People will have bad falls where bolts should have been placed and ultimately, climbing will be less safe, injuries more common, rescues more common and sadly, lives will be lost.

This will turn the climbing community against the USFS, which is a terrible thing to imagine given the commitment to partnership on both sides.

I strongly urge the USFS to ensure a healthy environment for the millions of climbers who make our public lands their frequent destinations, to honor the collaborative precedent established, and to reconsider the bolt prohibition.

Sincerely,

Josh Cleveland