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Comments: Hello, thank you for providing us with the opportunity to chime in on the aforementioned proposal to evaluate and authorize fixed hardware in U.S. wilderness areas.

My opinion is that if this Assessment were to result in a ban on bolting, re-bolting/maintenance or removal of existing "fixed" anchors and protection it would result in a great loss for the climbing community and lead to many avoidable accidents.

Bolts and anchors have a very long "shelf life", however with the popularity of climbing on the rise have had to be replaced at a higher rate than in generations past. These re-bolting efforts are often taken on under the personal volition of the original developers of the climbing area or groups like ASCA (American Safe Climbing Association), the Access Fund or local climbing organizations like SLCA (Salt Lake Climbers Alliance). It is my opinion that if this assessment were to result in a prohibition or ban on re-bolting efforts and/or the removal of already in-place protection such as "lead" bolts and "fixed" anchors, numerous misuse accidents would occur from trusting hardware that should have been replaced.

I have personally been involved in many re-bolting efforts and have established routes in multiple regions in the U.S. I can personally attest to the commendable integrity of the communities we have here in the U.S. of people who establish routes and climbing areas. It is rare to meet a route developer who doesn't take responsibility for maintaining and stewarding the area that they developed. These individuals are pillars of our community and they just don't bolt and climb. They build sustainable trails, maintain bolts and anchors when safety concerns arise, pick up trash (usually left by non-climbers) and educate other climbers on the ways they can be a positive force in the climbing community. Also, the replacement bolts and anchors are more often than not paid for out of their own pockets and they make these monetary and time consuming contributions out of the love for the sport. While there are definitely a couple "bad eggs" out there who maybe built a trail where they shouldn't have or damaged a resource that was sensitive, it is my opinion that the overwhelming majority of route developers are a positive force for the climbing community. If this assessment were to result in a ban on the future development of climbing areas and the maintenance of existing areas, the USDA would be alienating this valuable community of climbing advocates and stewards, resulting in an overall less "educated" user-group.

With the popularity of climbing on the rise, especially in the last 10 years, climbing areas have been getting overrun. It would be naive of us as a community to not acknowledge this reality. More and more climbers are coming "out of the gym" and into U.S wilderness lands to enjoy the phenomenal resources that this country has to offer for recreational climbing. I believe that we as the climbing community have done a fairly good job educating the newer generations of climbers on proper etiquette and behavior at the climbing areas but I also think that we could do a better job. Many organizations host "gym to crag" events that educate new climbers on these rules and etiquettes. Most of us who have been climbing for a while and have some experience with developing are not shy in educating people in the simple rule of "if we don't care for it and conduct ourselves properly, it will get taken away."

If this assessment were to result in a ban on bolting and developing new climbing areas it would result in the narrowing of possibilities for people to enjoy the sport of rock climbing, resulting in heavier impact on the already existing climbing areas that we currently have the privilege to enjoy. If the environmental impact of the climbing community is at the heart of the concern for this aforementioned "Assessment", please make that clear to us. I can guarantee that if this is the issue and if our community were given the opportunity to assist in making the changes that your organization is striving for, we will rise to the occasion to protect the privileges that we have been enjoying in the wilderness areas in the U.S.

To summarize, I believe that the climbing community as a whole is a very responsible and understanding user-group that is willing to listen to the criticism offered to it and make the necessary changes to appease the wishes of the USDA without the resource of safe and accessible climbing being taken away from it.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be heard in this matter.

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