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Comments: Dear NFS,

I write to express my deep concerns regarding the recently proposed climbing management guidance. As an avid climber with over six years of experience traversing rock, ice, and snow across more than a dozen U.S. states and five countries, I have witnessed firsthand the integral role that fixed anchors play in ensuring climber safety and enabling access to some of our nation's most inspiring wilderness areas.

The proposition to classify fixed anchors as prohibited installations under the Wilderness Act is a concerning departure from decades of established policy and practice. This reinterpretation not only undermines the historical context of wilderness climbing but also poses significant safety hazards. Fixed anchors are not mere conveniences; they are essential safety tools that enable climbers like myself to navigate challenging terrain responsibly and safely. Without them, numerous routes, particularly in backcountry and wilderness areas, would be rendered inaccessible or perilously unsafe.

I am particularly alarmed by the proposed Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) process for the authorization, replacement, and maintenance of fixed anchors. This bureaucratic hurdle not only impedes timely and necessary maintenance of these critical safety features but also burdens already under-resourced land agencies with an unfunded mandate. Climbers, as dedicated stewards of the environment, understand and respect the delicate balance between our activities and wilderness preservation. We are often at the forefront of conservation efforts, ensuring our impact on these pristine areas is minimal.

The proposed guidelines also overlook the crucial role climbers play in assessing and maintaining fixed anchors. This community-driven approach has historically ensured that climbing activities align with environmental preservation goals. Requiring land agencies to undertake this responsibility, without additional funding or resources, seems both impractical and inefficient. The maintenance of such fixed anchors has always been the responsibility of climbers, and the use of such anchors always comes down to individual judgment. Deeming fixed anchors installations opens thousands of such anchors up to potential lawsuits for removal, eventually crippling America's fantastic climbing resources (the best in the world traditional climbing, for now).

Moreover, legislative movements in Congress, including the Protecting America's Rock Climbing Act within the EXPLORE Act and the America's Outdoor Recreation Act, indicate a clear intent to protect wilderness climbing. This legislative support underscores the necessity of revisiting the proposed guidance to better align with both climbers' needs and wilderness conservation objectives.

Climbing is not just a sport, but a means of connecting deeply with nature. It fosters an appreciation for our natural world and encourages a commitment to its preservation. Therefore, it is imperative that any new policies not only consider the safety and freedom of climbers but also the long-term health of our wilderness areas.

In light of these considerations, I urge the NFS to collaborate with climbers and other stakeholders in rejecting the current proposal and instead developing guidelines that effectively balance the need for environmental protection with the rights and safety of climbers. The NFS' current proposal reveals a surprising and concerning lack of climbing knowledge. For instance, the text says: "Forest Supervisors may authorize the placement or replacement of fixed anchors and fixed equipment in wilderness... in areas where impacts on the rock face are occurring due to the use of rock hammers to chip hand holds or foot holds into the rock." No climbers hold the view that we should be chipping holds into the rock - that is an unacceptable defamation of a finite natural resource. That the NFS includes such statements in its proposal gives me little confidence that the agency knows

enough about climbing management to put together a coherent plan. Please scrap the current plan, and include climbers in any future revision. By working together, we can ensure that these treasured lands remain accessible and safe for future generations of climbers, all while preserving their natural beauty and integrity.

Thank you for considering my comments on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Cole