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First name: Camilo

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Land Managers

My name is Camilo Gomez, I am a professional climbing and hiking guide in Northern Colorado working primarily in Rocky Mountain National Park and the Clear Creek Ranger District of the Roosevelt National Forest. I am also a limited commission law enforcement Park Ranger for Larimer County Department of Natural Resources.

I am writing to express my concerns about and opposition to the proposed climbing management guidance regulations that are currently open for public, especially as they concern the installation and maintenance of fixed climbing anchors on NPS and USFS lands.

In short, I believe the proposed guidance will unnecessarily complicate the process of maintaining long established climbing routes and also effectively make said maintenance impossible in a meaningful timeframe. I believe it will also create a situation where climbers climbing otherwise low-risk routes in an ethical style may hesitate to conduct the standard maintenance on the route that is currently a standard part of the the ethics of climbing in remote wilderness locations and potentially bringing unnecessary risk to the climbers.

As both a recreator and a professional guide operating primarily in areas to be affected by this proposal I stand whole-heartedly behind well-thought-through climbing management plans. I do not want to see our wildernesses littered with unnecessary climbing anchors or equipment. I acknowledge that in some areas climbing may need to be limited or anchors may need to be removed to protect the wilderness resources. I believe an effective management plan will evaluate and close areas to maintenance or development on a case by case basis rather than the opposite of prohibiting maintenance and development except on a case by case basis as the current proposal suggests.

The reasons for this are many but I will comment on only a couple. First, at least in the areas I primarily work, anchors are not presenting what seems to be a significant impact relative to other permitted activities. In Rocky Mountain National Park for example, few people aside from the climbers who use them will ever see a fixed anchor. They are remote and when installed according to best practices they blend into their surroundings. Limiting access by a permit system to the entire park would have far greater success in maintaining a wilderness character than the proposed restrictions on anchor maintenance. Climbers do a relatively good job cleaning up after themselves. We remove unnecessary anchors and clean up old worn out gear often.

Next, this will be a next to unenforceable policy on the part of land managers. I believe very much in following the regulations of the managers where I work and recreate. I choose to do this despite knowing full well I could get away with almost anything. In four years of working in the wilderness of Rocky Mountain National Park I have seen a ranger in the backcountry only once. The most effective management policies that you can implement will be those that have the support of the climbing community.

I believe the NPS and USFS both have important and difficult jobs. I am grateful for the work of both agencies. We ask you keep allowing the climbing community to police ourselves and care for the mountain crags we love. Please do not make us choose between maintaining safe routes and following the regulations. We would much rather do both at the same time. The ethics of the sport are forever improving. I believe climbers want to work with land managers and follow the rules. Reconsidering the current rules prohibiting the maintenance and development of routes without a lengthy bureaucratic process will help this continue to be the case.

With respect,
Camilo Gomez