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First name: Sydney

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Organization: IORAA

Title: Director of Conservation Ecology

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed prohibition of permanent anchors and bolts on national park and federal forest land, as outlined in the recent draft policies. This decision could potentially erase America's most iconic climbing routes, and more importantly, put our safety at risk.

As an avid climber and a wildlife biologist, I understand the delicate balance between recreational activities and environmental conservation. Climbers have long been stewards of the land, embodying principles of leave no trace and engaging in sustainable practices. The climbing community is deeply committed to protecting wildlife habitats, including bird and bat nesting sites, often refraining from climbing during critical periods to ensure minimal disruption- & diligently posting and communicating these restrictions amongst ourselves.

Furthermore, climbers play a crucial role in environmental stewardship by conducting wildlife surveys and actively participating in conservation efforts. The discrete bolting techniques employed by climbers not only ensure their safety but also safeguard the natural landscape.

Bolts and fixed anchors are essential for the safety of climbers, especially in challenging terrain where traditional protection methods are not feasible. These installations save lives and enable climbers to navigate safely through rugged terrain. By prohibiting fixed anchors, the proposed policy not only endangers climbers but also undermines their contributions to National Park Service & U.S. federal Forests.

I urge you to reconsider the classification of fixed anchors as prohibited installations under the Wilderness Act and omit any language that would restrict climbers' access to essential safety equipment. Instead, I encourage the adoption of policies that recognize the responsible stewardship of climbers and prioritize the preservation of both their recreational opportunities and natural habitats.

The climbing community stands ready to collaborate with the agencies to develop policies that strike a balance between recreation and conservation. Our collective efforts can ensure the sustainable enjoyment of public lands for generations to come.

Thank you for considering my comments on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Sydney Stephens

Director of Conservation Ecology - IORAA