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Organization: Bower Climbing Coalition

Title: President

Comments: I am the president of a nonprofit organization called the Bower Climbing Coalition based out of Eastern WA. This is a fully volunteer-based, donation-funded organization that is responsible for the protection and maintenance of climbing areas in our region. Our scope of work involves repairing or replacing fixed anchors and other climbing hardware, graffiti removal, crag (climbing area) clean ups, donating to various parks departments for projects that affect climbers, maintaining access to climbing, and community outreach. I and the other members of my board are conservation focused, striving to improve or maintain the areas we utilize as climbers. Another main focus is on safety - if fixed anchors are not replaced when needed, lives are at stake due to gear failure.

I speak for our organization when I say that the proposed fixed anchor prohibition does not align with our interests and that it should be heavily revised or rejected.

First of all, I do not think that fixed anchors are a significant burden on the preservation of wilderness areas. All but the lowest anchors are not seen by anybody but climbers in the vast majority of areas, and the placement of a bolt does not impact the environment negatively. No flora or fauna are disturbed by anchors. When the Wilderness Act was first devised, climbing utilized different technology than it does today but all is being used for safety and enjoyment of these areas, and limiting their use would only limit or cease climbing in these areas. Perhaps climbers traveling to wilderness areas have an impact, but that does not mean the bolts themselves should be restricted.

Second, fixed anchors are necessary for safety in climbing. If your proposal bans or limits the ability to replace previously existing faulty gear, it will potentially jeopardize people's lives. If a climber cannot safely ascend or descend a route due to a paucity of gear, it will potentially jeopardize lives as well. I am an avid climber, and although I know it is difficult to put faith in self-governance, I can say that no climber is being irresponsible with the amount of gear they are installing - it is expensive and against our ethics to over-engineer a route. Therefore, the gear that exists is what is required for safety and not excessive.

Third, I think the proposal to allow anchors to be installed or to remain after investigation by the NPS (the MRA) is not feasible. It would require a massive amount of work hours to evaluate each bolt in wilderness areas for its pertinence, which would require hiring multiple employees. For a piece of hardware to be approved, it would have to be assessed by an employee of your organization that may or may not know anything about climbing and would have to access very difficult terrain to do so (i.e. hanging multiple thousands of feet in the air on El Capitan). Due to the labor and difficulty of this assessment, I doubt permission would be given back to many pieces of hardware. It would also stifle new innovation in climbing. Take, for example, the journey of Tommy Caldwell on the Dawn Wall, which was a national news story and heavily televised. He accomplished an amazing feat that inspired climbers and non-climbers alike and drew many attendants to Yosemite. There is no way he could have done what he did if he had to ask the NPS for permission to place each piece of fixed gear. It took him 8 years to find a way up the wall without these restrictions. It is impossible to plan a route until you are on the route, and you cannot predict where gear needs to go from the ground. I do not think this proposal will work.

Finally, the impact to climbing as a sport with this proposal would be massive. We as climbers, and myself in particular as the member of an organization with a focus on protection of wild areas, are your allies in the wilderness. We have a rich history of wilderness exploration AND of conservation as a user group. We would love to operate within guidelines that are geared towards actually protecting the areas we play in. This proposal does not accomplish this goal, and it takes away so much from us in the process. Please consider revising or refuting this proposal for the future of our sport and our partnership in the wild.