

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/30/2024 4:11:17 PM

First name: Matt

Last name: Riccardi

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear United States Forest Service,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the recent proposition to prohibit bolting, specifically the installation of fixed anchors, in wilderness areas. This decision, I believe, has far-reaching implications not only for the safety of climbers but also for the preservation of America's climbing heritage and the responsible exploration of wilderness areas.

Fixed anchors are a critical component of the climber's safety system and have been an accepted part of wilderness climbing for over fifty years. These anchors are not merely installations; they are essential for ensuring safe and responsible climbing in wilderness areas. The Wilderness Act does not prohibit such tools, and their judicious use has long been part of established climbing policies, contributing positively to the wilderness character while allowing for primitive and unconfined climbing experiences.

Prohibiting the use of fixed anchors creates significant safety issues. It imposes barriers to the regular maintenance of these anchors, a responsibility diligently undertaken by the climbing community. Maintenance of these anchors is crucial for safety, and any authorization process that impedes this can lead to hazardous conditions. Climbers often need to make critical safety decisions in the moment, and a policy that hinders these decisions can have dire consequences.

The prohibition of fixed anchors severely limits the exploration of wilderness areas. Climbing involves navigating complex vertical terrains, often requiring immediate decision-making. Fixed anchors are integral to this process, enabling climbers to explore safely and responsibly.

Another critical aspect is the impact on America's climbing legacy. Prohibiting fixed anchors threatens to erase significant achievements in the climbing world and could lead to the removal of historic climbing routes. It is crucial that climbing management policies protect these existing routes.

Regarding non-Wilderness lands, the restriction on establishing new routes to only "existing climbing opportunities" is problematic. This approach is not only unenforceable but also likely to cause confusion among land managers and climbers. It is essential that non-Wilderness climbing management policies continue to allow for new anchors, unless specific analyses indicate a need to restrict climbing to protect cultural and natural resources.

In light of these concerns, I urge the USFS to:

1. Recognize the essential role of fixed anchors in climber safety and wilderness climbing experiences.
2. Continue allowing and managing the use of fixed anchors in wilderness areas, as has been the practice.
3. Ensure that any policy changes do not hinder the safe maintenance and management of these anchors.
4. Protect the historical significance and legacy of climbing routes in wilderness areas.
5. Consider the impracticality and potential confusion arising from restricting new routes to existing climbing opportunities on non-Wilderness lands.

Climbing is not just a recreational activity; it is a means of engaging with our natural landscapes in a respectful and responsible manner. Fixed anchors play a vital role in facilitating this engagement. I hope the USFS will consider these points carefully and make a decision that supports the safety, legacy, and continued exploration of our wilderness areas.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and for protecting the natural spaces in the greatest country in the world.

Sincerely,

Matt Riccardi