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Comments: As a rock climber who learned to climb on the iconic walls of Yosemite National Park, I firmly believe fixed anchors are essential and should be permitted in wilderness. Fixed anchors have a long history in wilderness and have not previously been considered prohibited installations.

Thoughtfully placed fixed anchors are a boon to wilderness and non-wilderness areas. Without them, climbers must rappel directly off trees and bushes, which can eventually kill the vegetation. Anchors also clarify proper descents, preventing the development of additional social trails from climbers looking for where to descend or taking unclear walk-offs through delicate terrain.

Prohibiting fixed anchors would first and foremost cause severe safety issues. Climbers trust fixed anchors with their lives when they rappel or set up belays, and without the ability to update existing anchors or create new ones, they will risk using inadequate old gear or be forced to take dangerous walk-offs. In addition, bolts on routes in wilderness areas are already typically placed conservatively and sparingly where falls would cause injury or death. Further restricting bolts will lead to more accidents on wilderness routes.

Moreover, search and rescue organizations require fixed anchors to conduct rescues. Discouraging the maintenance of fixed anchors, and prohibiting the addition of new anchors, may make it impossible for search and rescue teams to do their jobs. This is compounded with the likelihood of more accidents due to climbers using inadequate gear as described above.

Efforts to regulate fixed anchors would also be untenable for federal agencies. Bolt and anchor placements are deeply specific to individual routes and locations and require both substantial climbing expertise in general and time spent evaluating a given route specifically. It is difficult to impossible to imagine the time and resources that would be required for land managers to formally assess all existing and potential new anchors.

Climbers as a community are committed stewards of wilderness and already self-regulate fixed anchors based on long-held climbing norms, assessments of safety, and respect for nature. Events like Yosemite Facelift exemplify how climbers can work hand-in-hand with land managers to protect wilderness and leave areas better than they found them. This proposal will not achieve its purported goals, and land managers should instead continue to collaborate with climbers who are committed to responsibly balancing conservation and recreation.