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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

I have been a climber for more than 60 years and am an honorary member of both the American Alpine Club and the British Alpine Club. I received the 2023 lifetime achievement award from the Piolets d'Or.

I have climbed extensively in national forest wilderness all over the United States. Many historic climbs that I have done, including my own first ascents in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and Alaska, would not be possible without the judicious use of fixed anchors such as pitons, bolts, and slings, either for belay anchors, climbing protection, or rappel descents. Fixed anchors are an essential component of the climber's safety system and allow for "primitive and unconfined" recreation in wilderness. In no way are they prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. In particular, rappel anchors are critical in order to descend from many routes safely.

The use of fixed anchors on rock climbs and mountain routes in wilderness has been a well-established practice in the United States for nearly a century. Climbers, besides being among the most outspoken advocates for wilderness values, have a good record of stewardship of the public lands we hold dear. Fixed anchors are indispensable, minimal tool for sustainable wilderness climbing. It is essential that the safe and responsible use of fixed anchors in national forest wilderness areas remains available to the climbing community.

In addition, restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-wilderness national forest lands is unenforceable and will create confusion for land managers and climbers. Non-wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

However, I think it is important for climbers to be very strongly encouraged to practice "clean climbing" to minimize damaging the rock. Unfortunate piton placement and removal has dramatically changed the nature of some climbs for the worse. I also think that additional installations of sport climbing routes in the wilderness is probably inappropriate.

Please revise your climbing guidance to reflect the practice and precedent of at least the last 60-plus years: that fixed anchors for climbing can be used, replaced, and maintained in designated wilderness and non-wilderness areas in our national forest areas.

Sincerely,

George H Lowe III, PhD (physics)