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First name: Dustin

Last name: Stephens

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Sir or Madam,

I have been a climber for more than 30 years. It has been a life-changing, and in many ways, life-saving creative practice and spiritual connection to nature for me since adolescence. I have established and replaced fixed climbing anchors at climbing areas throughout North America for close to 20 years, including on USFS-managed lands. I am also a physician who practices in a small rural community as well as in the severely underserved jail system of Los Angeles county. I rely on safe, sensibly managed climbing and outdoor recreation to maintain my own mental health so I can be the best provider I can be for my patients and community.

I am taking time out of my patient care duties today to write these comments because I am very deeply concerned about the draft management plan put forth in the current proposal. Much like misdirected policy in medicine, the current proposal will create serious and tangible safety risks to rock climbers and alpinists throughout the United States. The proposed policy is unrealistic and out of touch with climbers' long history and strong tradition of exploration and recreation on federally managed lands, and it falls profoundly short of current recreational use needs of climbers and the maintenance requirements of climbing anchors in the national forests and other federally-managed lands. The policies are overly restrictive, onerous, and will create serious safety hazards to the climbing community.

Finally, rock climbing and mountaineering have become vital contributors to the economies of small rural communities such as the one I currently call home (Eastern Sierra of California). These unnecessary and misdirected policies will lead to significant economic losses in this and other similar small communities that rely on the substantial influx of the tourism and recreation-based revenue that safe and sustainable climbing creates. Please reconsider and revise these major and in many ways radical changes to climbing management before these safety and economic impacts are realized. Climbing is more than mere recreation for so many of us in this country -- it is a way of life, a reconvening with nature, spiritual practice, and in many under-resourced parts of this country, it is an economic lifeblood.

Sincerely,

Dustin B. Stephens MD PhD