

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/30/2024 5:49:16 PM

First name: Alex

Last name: Kutches

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Greetings,

The proposed ban on bolts in Wilderness areas is a major issue that will greatly impact accessibility for a huge group of users for the national parks as well as our national forests and public lands.

I have worked in the Outdoor Industry my entire career at Marmot, Outdoor Research and Mystery Ranch. Some of my fondest memories are climbing our parks and national forests: Joshua Tree, Yosemite, Red Rocks, City of Rocks, and the list goes on. I have also served on the Board of the Access Fund for 9 years and feel like this legislation is a massive mistake.

Restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will create confusion amongst 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.

Fixed anchors are an essential piece of climbers' safety system and are not prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Following existing climbing policies that allow judicious use of fixed anchors for more than a half century will do more to protect Wilderness character while providing for primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing.

It is unreasonable for federal agencies to create new guidance policies prohibiting Wilderness climbing anchors across the country when they have allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades.

Prohibiting fixed anchors will create safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to the regular maintenance of fixed anchors, a responsibility undertaken by the climbing community. Critical safety decisions often must be made in the moment and any authorization process should not impede those decisions. Fixed anchor maintenance needs to be managed in a way that incentivizes safe anchor replacement and does not risk the removal of climbing routes.

Prohibiting fixed anchors obstructs appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Land managers need to allow climbers to explore Wilderness in a way that permits in-the-moment decisions that are necessary when navigating complex vertical terrain.

Prohibiting fixed anchors will threaten America's rich climbing legacy and could erase some of the world's greatest climbing achievements. Climbing management policy needs to protect existing routes from removal.

I urge you to reconsider and maintain the current policies and access to protect the climbers and allow an organized way to access these wild places to inspire a next generation of Americans to enjoy this great land that we live in.

Sincerely,

Alex Kutches

President

Mystery Ranch Packs