

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/30/2024 7:54:27 PM

First name: Ashley

Last name: Schneider

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express my deep concern and urgency regarding the recent draft policies proposed by the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which, if implemented, could have a profound impact on the future of climbing in America's Wilderness areas. The proposed prohibition of fixed anchors, including bolts, pitons, and slings, threatens not only the rich climbing heritage that spans nearly six decades but also compromises the safety of our climbing community, both as a member and non-profit organizer.

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.

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.

In conclusion, the proposed policies by the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service threaten to undermine nearly six decades of responsible climbing practices, jeopardizing both our rich climbing heritage and the safety of our community. As a concerned member and non-profit organizer, I urge a reconsideration of these policies. Fixed anchors, vital for climbers' safety, have been judiciously used for decades without compromising Wilderness character. The creation of new guidance policies categorizing fixed anchors as prohibited installations seems unwarranted, given the historical management and authorization of their use by federal agencies. Prohibiting fixed anchors not only impedes regular maintenance but also obstructs responsible exploration of Wilderness areas, hindering climbers from making essential in-the-moment decisions. To protect our climbing legacy and ensure safety, it is crucial for the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service to work collaboratively with the climbing community, finding solutions that balance the preservation of Wilderness character and the safety of climbers on these iconic routes.