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Comments: To whom it may concern,

As a professional mountain guide as well as a recreational rock climber, I wish to comment on the November 17, 2023, US Forest Service-issued, draft climbing management guidance. If implemented, the guidance would create significant safety issues, threaten world-class climbing routes (many were established prior to wilderness designations), obstruct appropriate wilderness exploration, and burden land managers and climbers with unnecessary red tape.

As climbers, fixed anchors are essential pieces of our safety system that allow us to safely and sustainably access vertical terrain. Without fixed anchors, many of the wildest and most inspiring places in America would become inaccessible to the public.

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.

In addition, on USFS land:

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.

Please reconsider your priorities and accept the suggestions stated above.

Thank you,