

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/30/2024 10:51:00 PM

First name: Sarah

Last name: E Murphy

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express my concerns regarding the recent guidance policies that prohibit the use of fixed anchors in Wilderness areas. As an avid climber and a member of the climbing community, I believe it is essential to address the potential impact of such prohibitions on the safety of climbers and the preservation of Wilderness character.

Fixed anchors play a crucial role in climbers' safety systems and have been an accepted practice within the climbing community for over half a century. I would like to emphasize that fixed anchors are not prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Enforcing policies that align with existing climbing practices will not only contribute to the protection of Wilderness character but also allow for primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing.

It is concerning that federal agencies are considering new guidance policies that could restrict the use of fixed anchors, especially when these agencies have historically allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades. Prohibiting fixed anchors could lead to safety issues by impeding the regular maintenance of these anchors, a responsibility that the climbing community undertakes. Decisions regarding fixed anchor maintenance often need to be made in the moment, and any authorization process should not hinder these critical safety decisions.

Furthermore, prohibiting fixed anchors may hinder appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas, preventing climbers from making necessary in-the-moment decisions when navigating complex vertical terrain. Climbers play a significant role in managing fixed anchors, and policies should incentivize safe anchor replacement without risking the removal of climbing routes.

I am particularly concerned about the potential threat to America's rich climbing legacy and the possible erasure of some of the world's greatest climbing achievements. Climbing management policies should prioritize the protection of existing routes from removal and ensure that the climbing community can continue to contribute to this legacy.

Lastly, the restriction of new route establishment to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is likely to be unenforceable and may lead to confusion among land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policies should allow for the establishment of new anchors unless analyses determine that climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

In conclusion, I urge you to reconsider the prohibition of fixed anchors in Wilderness areas and instead support policies that align with the longstanding practices of the climbing community. Such an approach will contribute to the preservation of Wilderness character, ensure the safety of climbers, and protect America's rich climbing legacy.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to a thoughtful consideration of the concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,

Sarah