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Title:

Comments: Title: The Case Against Prohibiting Climbing Anchors in Wilderness Areas

Climbing anchors serve as a fundamental element of safety within the realm of rock climbing, enabling climbers to navigate vertical terrain with a degree of security vital to their well-being. The proposition to prohibit climbing anchors in wilderness areas, however, stands in direct contradiction to the public interest. Such a prohibition not only undermines the core principles of safety but also jeopardizes the longstanding tradition of climbing in these natural spaces.

Federal agencies, tasked with managing wilderness areas, have historically permitted and regulated the use of fixed anchors for climbing purposes. These agencies have established policies that recognize the importance of fixed anchors in facilitating safe climbing experiences while preserving the pristine nature of wilderness environments. By abruptly introducing prohibitive guidance against climbing anchors, these agencies risk disregarding decades of established practices and undermining the balance between conservation and recreational access.

Moreover, the prohibition of fixed anchors poses significant safety concerns for climbers. Regular maintenance of these anchors is essential to ensuring their reliability and effectiveness in safeguarding climbers' lives. Any hindrance to this maintenance process, such as bureaucratic authorization procedures, could impede timely replacements and compromise safety on climbing routes. Climbing inherently involves split-second decisions, and any delay in anchor maintenance could exacerbate risks for climbers navigating treacherous terrain.

Beyond safety implications, prohibiting fixed anchors restricts climbers' ability to explore wilderness areas in a manner conducive to their sport. Climbers rely on the flexibility to make real-time decisions when encountering challenging landscapes, and the presence of fixed anchors facilitates this exploration. Denying climbers access to fixed anchors limits their ability to traverse and appreciate the natural beauty of wilderness areas, stifling the spirit of adventure and discovery that defines climbing culture.

Furthermore, the rule changes and development of management plans come with no funding mechanism attached, placing an unnecessary and unsustainable burden on the already short-staffed Forest Service and Park Service. Without adequate resources, enforcing such prohibitions becomes impractical and could lead to unintended consequences for both climbers and the wilderness areas they seek to enjoy responsibly. The US Forest Service and National Park Service should instead consider existing fixed anchors, both within and outside of wilderness areas, to be approved and appropriate until a comprehensive resource analysis can be conducted to determine their suitability.

Additionally, USFS and NPS locations need to either begin or continue working closely with the local climbing community as an essential partner in maintaining climber safety and promoting outdoor recreation. The expertise and dedication of the climbing community can complement the efforts of federal agencies in managing climbing resources effectively while ensuring the preservation of wilderness character. Collaborative approaches that engage stakeholders foster a sense of shared responsibility for the stewardship of wilderness areas, ultimately benefiting both climbers and the natural environment.

In conclusion, the prohibition of climbing anchors in wilderness areas not only undermines safety and recreational access but also imposes unsustainable management burdens on federal agencies. By recognizing the value of fixed anchors, engaging with local climbing communities, and prioritizing collaborative management strategies, the US Forest Service and National Park Service can uphold the principles of conservation while preserving the

rich legacy of climbing in America's wilderness areas.