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First name: Clayton

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Clayton Auld, and I am a resident of Anchorage, Alaska. Alaska is a state with the 4th highest land percentage owned by federal entities but consists of the most acreage of any state owned by federal entities. This sheer number makes all other states pale in comparison. This federal land is vitally important to our state, its people, and its ecology and wilderness.

The forest service land in Alaska is accessed by citizens of every state, and citizens of many countries. Alaska is a destination for the world to access our vast wilderness in pursuit of outdoor experiences that transcend any other location on the planet. It is world-renowned for massive peaks, difficult terrain, and vast wilderness. It is one of the last truly wild locations on earth, and perhaps the only truly wild locations in our country. "The Last Frontier" is still a frontier in nearly every aspect of the word.

The proposed changes to land management policy would put at risk the ability for all climbing activities in Alaska to be handled safely. In the remote regions of Alaska, it is not typical to leave permanent installations, however there are locations where safety is paramount and removing bolt installations would risk death for any who have already relied on these placements or assume these placements to still be available.

I am a member of our local search and rescue organization, the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group. As with nearly every mountain rescue organization in the country, we are vastly understaffed and are an all-volunteer group. It is my view that implementing these proposed regulations around bolt placements would increase the number of SAR callouts because the local guidebooks and information rely on these placements for safe climbing activities. There would be a sharp increase in high-angle rescues because of bolt removals demanded by these policies, and the organization itself would be stressed to a breaking point due to the increased demand for our rescue services. We would not be able to handle the massive influx of rescue needs, unable to ensure our own safety during rescues, and the result would be loss of life and limb to all outdoor climbing endeavors in our region. The increases in losses of life would be catastrophic rendering our organization helpless to aid climbers in need due to our own concerns of risk and safety. We would be required to revamp our rescue training curriculum if we were to continue to offer high-angle rescue services because we would not be able to depend on any bolt installations in any location. This would vastly increase the training requirements, costs of rescue and training, and increase the risk to our members.

Alaska is a state that views its access to wilderness as a point of pride. Limiting the ability for bolt installations would deem much of the wilderness areas inaccessible because of the sheer risk involved with removing bolt installations that have been placed decades ago and are continually relied upon for safe access. It would limit any new installations where necessary without an arduous approval process, require the local land manager organization to justify every existing bolt in every region. This would be an arduous process that is doomed to fail and demands the land managers to access incredibly difficult and risky terrain only to remove existing bolts. This would stress the group responsible for managing the areas and create a very risky proposition for the land managers, while making the terrain inaccessible to any of the public.

I sincerely hope you will consider my views here. These are my own views and are not representative of the Alaska Mountain Rescue Group or the Mountain Rescue Association.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this input.

Sincerely,

Clayton Auld  
Anchorage, AK