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Title:

Comments: I am writing to submit my feedback on your proposed new policies that would classify fixed anchors as "prohibited installations" in wilderness areas.

I am a life-long hiker, climber, and biker. I have enjoyed visiting, exploring, and climbing in many national parks and wilderness areas, from the White Mountains of New Hampshire to Yosemite and the Pacific Northwest. I have travelled to these areas with the specific purpose of rock, ice, and alpine climbing. I understand the importance of protecting these areas from improper uses, to preserve their character and the experience for future generations.

I feel your proposed policies regarding fixed anchors would be disastrous to the sport of climbing, which has always been a traditional and appropriate use of wilderness areas and in fact is the reason I normally visit them. Your proposal to restrict fixed anchors would virtually kill this use in all but some limited circumstances. Land managers have long allowed, managed, and authorized fixed anchors going back decades and it is unreasonable to suddenly change policy like this. I understand the need to manage anchors but banning them is not the solution.

Your proposals as currently written would put climber's lives in serious danger because anchors are a critical part of safe climbing. It is completely appropriate to manage fixed anchors in wilderness areas as provided for by current policy, such as restricting the use of motorized drills, which makes it time consuming to install a bolt, naturally limiting their use to when it is absolutely necessary. It is also completely appropriate to require anchors to be disguised and/or hidden and to provide for the removal of anchors that are not in compliance with policy. Also, I would support some targeted, local further restrictions in highly sensitive or heavily used areas to prevent degradation of the environment and wilderness experience. However, I am strongly against an outright ban on the use of slings, bolts, or pitons as these are extremely critical and necessary for safe climbing in the wilderness. I also feel a prohibition on establishing new routes in wilderness areas is totally unreasonable. The essence of adventure and exploration is what wilderness is all about.

The maintenance of existing climbing routes must also be considered in this policy. First, it is critically important that existing routes are not eliminated due to a change in policy. Additionally, maintenance over time must be considered. Currently, climbers maintain routes including providing for safe anchors. When you are on a climb and encounter an unsafe situation, such as an anchor damaged by rockfall, it is critically important that a climber be allowed to take action to restore a safe anchor by replacing aged or damaged anchor points.

Climbing has a long history in our parks and wilderness areas and has always been considered an acceptable use. Fixed anchors are a necessary part of climbing for all but the very few who choose to free solo. It is reasonable to provide for the management of these anchors, especially in wilderness areas, but classifying them as "prohibited installations" is going too far. Most wilderness areas will be wholly unimpacted by the occasional placement of an anchor to allow for safe climbing. In areas that are extraordinarily sensitive, or see heavy use, increase management and restrictions are more than appropriate.

I urge you to revise your proposed policies to better balance the needs of climbers with your conservation and preservation goals.