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Comments: Foremost, it should be stated that the use of fixed anchors by climbers predates the Wilderness Act. Further, the use of fixed anchors by climbers predate many wilderness areas. With the point being that fixed anchors have not been an issue in defining what is and is not wilderness. In addition, for the past 60 years fixed anchors have not been a management issue. Especially, in light of fixed anchors being allowed and managed for decades.

In reading both the NPS and Forest Service proposed rulemaking, while it is admirable that both agencies are trying to coordinate the management. It falls short in requiring MRAs.

Section 2355.03 - Policy

5. The placement, replacement and retention of fixed anchors and fixed equipment are permissible in wilderness when it is determined that they are the minimum necessary to facilitate primitive or unconfined recreation or otherwise preserve wilderness character. Existing fixed anchors and fixed equipment may be retained pending completion of a Minimum Requirements Analysis, as funding and resources allow, to determine whether they are the minimum necessary for administration of the area for Wilderness Act purposes (FSM 2355.32).

It is well established that when used, fixed anchors are the minimum necessary. What is not well established is when they facilitate primitive or unconfined recreation. Namely the issue is with short bolt intensive routes. The point is that a MRA is not necessary. Having to prepare an MRA on a route, area, district, forest, etc. basis is illogical, redundant, and burdensome.

By requiring MRAs, it is de-facto ban on the use and replacement of fixed anchors in designated wilderness areas. Simply because the agencies do not have the resources to do such management. What is need are climbing management plans that have a consistent process for managing climbing. Once in place, the management of fixed anchors will be a simple approval process.

The draft document utterly fails to recognize that wilderness boundaries are located next to major highways. In American Fork Canyon the highway is 200 feet from the wilderness boundary. I have been up on routes and listen to people parked next to the road and their booming music which was moments before was momentarily drowned out by roar of motorcycles. That is not a wilderness experience. More over the fixed anchors in American Fork Canyon have less impact than the thousands of vehicles that daily travel along Highway 92. The point again being unit specific management plans are needed not a MRA when a fixed anchor in American Fork Canyon needs to be replaced over the roar of motorcycles and music.

Section 2355.31

3. Restrict the placement and replacement of fixed anchors and fixed equipment to established climbing opportunities and to approved new climbing opportunities that have been evaluated for natural and cultural resource impacts.

The above is an unmanageable regulation. What exactly are an approved new climbing opportunities? Why does one need permission to climb and use fixed gear in a new area?

Does one need permission to hike off trail in a new area. No. A hiker may cause natural and cultural resource impacts that are far greater than the impact of a climber and the installation of fix anchors. Yet they have no restrictions. Given the above logic the Forest should fence off and post signs requiring all hikers to stay on the established trails.

4. Existing fixed anchors and fixed equipment may be used without restriction when consistent with the applicable climbing management plan, except in areas closed to climbing

If there is no climbing management plan then what? The vast majority forests do not have a climbing management plan. Lacking a plan what is the policy.

Specific comments:

Section 2355.1 - Inherent Risk of Climbing on NFS Lands

Climbing opportunities on NFS lands have a development scale of 0, 1, or, in rare cases, 2.

This statement has no context, no reference, nothing. As such, the whole of the paragraph no relevance.

Section 2355.31

3. Restrict the placement and replacement of fixed anchors and fixed equipment to established climbing opportunities and to approved new climbing opportunities that have been evaluated for natural and cultural resource impacts. Allow placement and replacement of fixed anchors only for purposes of belay, rappel, traverse, resource protection, or aiding in ascent and descent. Do not allow extensive or arbitrary placement and replacement of fixed anchors and fixed equipment without regard to rock features that provide natural opportunities for ascent and descent, such as where fixed anchors and fixed equipment are placed or replaced at a location that is otherwise climbable purely to make the climb easier, as opposed to at a location that is not otherwise climbable to enable a climber's ascent and descent of a climbing route identified in the applicable climbing management plan.

The above paragraph in its totality is unadulterated nonsensical gobbledegook. Was this taken from an early version ChatGTP? The first sentence seems to be main thrust and as discussed above. The rest is gobbledegook.

6. Motorized rock drills may be used to the extent they are consistent with the applicable climbing management plan.

There is no such thing as a motorized rock drill. There are motorized drills. There are also hand drills. Should they not be consider as well?

7. Analyze the placement and replacement of fixed anchors and fixed equipment to facilitate emergency operations and document the analysis and the decision based on the analysis.

More gobbledegook. Isn't the analysis the document? What decision? The decision to use a fixed anchor in an emergency??

All-in-all the Forest Service already has the tools necessary to manage climbing and fixed anchors, it is called a Climbing Management Plan. Further, a Climbing Management Plan with a process for managing fixed anchors in wilderness. If necessary a system wide MRA could be in place so to meet the letter of the law of the Wilderness Act. Numerous places have such plans. For instance, the City of Rocks requires approval for routes using fixed anchors. A similar process could be implemented for routes using fixed anchors in wilderness.

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Comments sent to the National Park Service:

Foremost, it should be stated that the use of fixed anchors by climbers predates the Wilderness Act. Further, the use of fixed anchors by climbers predate many wilderness areas. With the point being that fixed anchors have not been an issue in defining what is and is not wilderness. In addition, for the past 60 years fixed anchors have not been a management issue. Especially, in light of fixed anchors being allowed and managed for decades. In reading both the NPS and Forest Service proposed rulemaking, while it is admirable that both agencies are trying to coordinate the management. It falls short in requiring MRAs.

Director's 41 Order previously gave the NPS guidance on climbing on National Park Service administered lands. It recognized climbing as a legitimate use of all lands including designated wilderness. Further it recognizes that fixed anchors are often an integral part of a climber's safety. Draft Reference Manual 41 bastardizes DO 41 into a management process that is illogical, redundant, and burdensome in requiring MRAs.

By requiring MRAs, it is de-facto ban on the use and replacement of fixed anchors in designated wilderness areas. Simply because the agencies do not have the resources to do such management. What is need are climbing management plans that have a consistent process for managing climbing. Once in place, the management of fixed anchors will be a simple approval process.

Section 1 Purpose and Need

This Reference Manual 41 directive clarifies that fixed anchors and fixed equipment (hereinafter referred to as "fixed anchors") are a type of installation under §4(c) of the Wilderness Act, consistent with the definition of that term in Reference Manual 41 §3.1 as "anything made by humans that is not intended for human occupation and is left unattended or left behind when the installer leaves the wilderness." Fixed anchors fall into this definition because they are installed and remain in place long after the installer has left. Although fixed anchors may be small, there is no 'de minimis' exception to the Wilderness Act's restriction on installations, and the combined impact of many fixed anchors in a single area or rock wall can have a significant effect on wilderness character. Therefore, fixed anchors constitute a prohibited use pursuant to the Wilderness Act §4(c) and may only be authorized if they are determined to be "necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of [The Wilderness Act]" through a minimum requirements analysis (MRA).

Reference Manual 41 §3.1 - Installation: Anything made by humans that is not intended for human occupation and is left unattended or left behind when the installer leaves the wilderness.

Reference Manual 41 §3.1 - Structure: Anything made by humans that is intended for human occupation, or their possessions, and is left behind when the builder leaves the wilderness.

The above are NPS definitions. Those precise definitions are not part of the Wilderness Act:

PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN USES

(c) Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act and except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.

As such, the premise that fixed anchors are installation is a designation made by the NPS not the Wilderness Act. I would argue that the NPS definitions of a structure and an installation are incorrect. A bridge is a structure not an installation. A bear box is an installation not structure. As such, the NPS must first return to the basic definitions and reframe them to be correct.

For sake on the argument that fixed anchors are now an installation and subject to meeting the minimum requirements for the administration of the area there is nothing in the Wilderness Act that would preclude the NPS from doing that analysis for the whole of the NPS system. In large part Director's 41 Order does that.

It should be noted that in DO 41 the only mention of MRA is in the context of administrative purposes:

Proposals for the placement of fixed anchors or fixed equipment for the administrative purpose of facilitating future rescue operations must be evaluated through a MRA.

At the same time it would behoove the NPS to follow DO 41:

If climbing activities occur in wilderness, climbing management strategies will be included as part of the park's Wilderness Stewardship Plan

That is real crux. And where the NPS has consistently failed over the past decade to begin to implement DO 41 as it pertains to climbing management strategies.

DO 41 gives more than adequate guidance:

The occasional placement of a fixed anchor for belay, rappel, or protection purposes does not necessarily impair the future enjoyment of wilderness or violate the Wilderness Act. However, climbing practices with the least negative impact on wilderness resources and character will always be the preferred choice.

The establishment of bolt-intensive face climbs is considered incompatible with wilderness preservation and management due to the concentration of human activity which they support, and the types and levels of impacts associated with such routes. Climbing management strategies will address ways to control, and in some cases reduce, the number of fixed anchors to protect the park's wilderness resources or to preserve the "untrammelled," "undeveloped," and "outstanding opportunities for solitude" qualities of the park's wilderness character.

Fixed anchors or fixed equipment should be rare in wilderness. Authorization will be required for the placement of new fixed anchors or fixed equipment. Authorization may be required for the replacement or removal of existing fixed anchors or fixed equipment. The authorization process to be followed will be established at the park level and will be based on a consideration of resource issues (including the wilderness resource) and recreation opportunities. Authorization may be issued programmatically within the Wilderness Stewardship Plan or other activity-level plan, or specifically on a case-by-case basis, such as through a permit system. Prior to the completion of the park's Wilderness Stewardship Plan or other activity-level plan, the park superintendent may approve new fixed anchors or fixed equipment on a case-by-case basis.

This first paragraph does what the MRA would do. The second and third paragraph gives needed guidance. For instance Crest Jewel on North Dome in Yosemite is a ten pitch route that primarily uses bolts for protection. I would not consider it to be a bolt-intensive face climb. Nor would I consider the five pitch climb Table of Contents on Stately Pleasure Dome in Tuolumne Meadows to be a bolt-intensive face climb. Simply because they are multi-pitch routes. Both routes are in wilderness. North Dome requires an hour long approach, Stately Pleasure Dome requires a minute long approach.

Both routes, do not need an MRA nor does Yosemite need a programmatic wide MRA. To reiterate an MRA is not required for each unit or for every time a fixed anchor is need. What is required is for the NPS to implement area specific climbing plans that follow a standardize process. That was done at the City of Rocks and Joshua Tree over thirty years ago. Using the MRA is using a sledge hammer. Again the second and third paragraph of DO 41 gives needed guidance for implementing a climbing management plan.

The draft document utterly fails to recognize that wilderness boundaries are located next to major highways. Stately Pleasure Dome and it's a minute long approach is 200 feet from the wilderness boundary. I have been high up on routes and yelled to people parked next to the road at Tenaya Lake to turn off their booming music which was moments before was momentarily drowned out by roar of motorcycles. That is not a wilderness experience. More over the fixed anchors in Tuolumne Meadows have less impact than the thousands of vehicles that daily travel along Highway 120. The point again being unit specific management plans are needed not MRA when a fixed anchor on Stately Pleasure Dome needs to be replaced over the roar of motorcycles and music.

Some specific comments:

Section 4 Minimum Requirements Analysis

As noted above, there should be a single MRA for the whole of the NPS system.

Step 1 of MRA is superfluous. That is all aspects of Step 1 can be address and have been addressed in DO 41. Requiring such analysis for each and every MRA is redundant.

For example, parks should consider whether climbing is identified as an important recreational activity in the unit's enabling legislation, wilderness designation, foundation document, or management plans.

To my knowledge only one unit, Bears Ears National Monument of the NPS has ever identified climbing in its enabling legislation, wilderness designation, foundation document. As such, this consideration is moot especially

in light of DO 41.

Additionally, Step 1 of the MRA process should discuss how recreational climbing preserves the qualities of wilderness character.

Technically any human activity in wilderness does not preserve the qualities of wilderness character. As such, this requirement is illogical.

Step 2 of MRA is superfluous. That is all aspects of Step 2 can be address and have been addressed in DO 41.

Requiring such analysis for each and every MRA is redundant.

2) Recreational climbing can have a positive impact on the primitive and unconfined recreation quality of wilderness character and may also have a positive impact on the solitude quality of wilderness character.

The fact that a human is present negatively impacts solitude. The question is how much impact? As such, this factor is illogically written.

Section 6

*Warnings or advisories that the NPS does not install climbing bolts and users should confirm any bolt's fitness for use before using it are highly recommended.

This warning is specific to bolts, it should apply to all fixed anchors.

Overall I am disappointed in the NPS. DO 41 has been in place for over decade. A decade in which the NPS could have implemented a climbing management that follows DO 41. Further, a climbing management plan that could serve as model for other units of the NPS. It seemed that Joshua Tree NP was on the verge of a new plan until the NPS was side tracked with MRAs.

Fixed anchors in wilderness are acceptable. Just as trails are acceptable. However just like certain areas become trail intensive some climbing areas become fixed anchor intensive and need to be manage accordingly. DO 41 gives that management guidance without requiring MRA. Implement it just as has been done at the City of Rocks.

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