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Comments: I am an avid climber, canyoneer, caver, and mountaineer. Fixed anchors have enabled me to access canyons, climbs, and summits that I otherwise would not have been able to, providing me the opportunity to immerse myself in nature in ways I could not have fathomed years ago. They have allowed me to experience the beauty and thrill of nature in an all-encompassing manner; away from the crowds and noise pollution. I love hiking and backpacking, but to be able to climb cliffs and mountains and rappel canyons and caves has brought me closer to nature, fostering a deeper love and appreciation for the natural environment and the unique landscapes which fixed anchors have enabled me to wander. And because I have seen and experienced the wonder of the natural world in such intimate settings, I have become an advocate for its preservation. My experiences in pristine natural environments, often facilitated by the existence and use of fixed anchors, have motivated me to become a steward of wilderness areas. I now volunteer, restoring more heavily-trafficked trails and natural areas, cleaning graffiti from caves and canyons, leading teaching sessions on safe rope techniques. I can say with certainty that I would not feel compelled to protect and support wilderness/non-wilderness areas and outdoors education if I had not been able to experience the outdoors in such an intimate manner. I would likely still be slogging along at my previous job in oil refining, detached from the natural world. But my experiences have left me indebted to the natural world, and I fear the prohibition of fixed anchors in wilderness areas and severe limitation of fixed anchors in non-wilderness areas would result in less advocacy for natural spaces overall, as it would deprive many of the opportunity to ignite their dormant passions for conservation. Without fixed anchors, many of the canyons, caves, and climbs I enjoy would become much higher risk endeavors. Our anchors often allow us to run lines that minimize risk of rope cutting, rockfall, the need to navigate extremely hazardous terrain, as well as providing means to protect ourselves in critical areas. Fixed anchors also often make more technical terrain safer and more approachable for those still building experience, a point I deeply resonate with as I have sought to rapidly but safely build my skill-set in the past few years. But even for the most technically proficient, prohibiting fixed anchors would inevitably and unavoidably make the activities that I and many others participate in more dangerous, removing the option to rappel or climb in a manner that mitigates the most risk.

Additionally, from a sustainability perspective, while fixed anchors may leave some small impact on the areas they are placed, I would argue that removal of these anchors would only increase the impact of human trafficking to the environment. For example, in-canyon fixed bolts frequently allow canyoneers to remain in canyon and minimize team foot print. If these bolts are removed or prohibited, canyoneers will need to find alternative anchors, which are frequently trees, roots, cairns, etc. For more heavily trafficked canyons, the repeated use of natural anchors will increase the damage caused by outdoor athletes. For example, if tree rigging is the fixed alternative, the area around the tree and out of the canyon will experience rapid ground erosion due to increased foot traffic, the trees themselves will be damaged by repeated use, and there is a higher chance of in-canyon damage as the limited anchor options also limits the ability for a team to select lower impact rappel lines. Additionally, as mentioned prior, sometimes fixed anchors are truly the safest option for travel, and the use of more unsafe anchors points cannot be decoupled from potential sustainability impacts, as caves, canyons, and climbs are left far from unscathed when a large-scale rescue is required within their bounds.

Overall, I do believe that fixed anchors are not the only anchors that should be used in nature, and this topic is far more nuanced than a simple categorization of "good" or "bad". However, electing to broad-brush policy and prohibit or severely limit fixed anchors will only serve to 1) create unnecessary risk to those who desire to engage with the natural world through climbing, canyoning, caving, and many other activities, as well as 2) result in higher impact recreation in many areas than what currently exists today. For me, fixed anchors have contributed to the enriching outdoors-lifestyle I enjoy today, and have in-turn inspired me to give back to the outdoors. Therefore, I send these comments not only for my benefit, but in hopes that the pipeline of future outdoors advocates, stewards, and volunteers does not get constricted through the implementation of such restrictive policy.

