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Comments: It's come to my attention that both the National Park Service and the US Forest Service have released draft policies that would prohibit fixed anchors in Wilderness Areas. This is truly a manufactured crisis seeking to solve a problem that doesn't exist, will have no effect on the essential wilderness experience, and will likely result in the needless deaths of climbers due to unsafe situations legislated by far away people with no relevant experience.

Fixed anchors have been used in the mountains since people began climbing. In North Cascades National Park, near my home, the first fixed pitons were used in 1936. Nowhere in that wilderness are fixed anchors installed frivolously, but only in places essential for life safety in ascent and descent. None of these anchors have any impact on any user group outside of climbers - they simply aren't obvious or perceptible to anyone not using them.

Various parks have sought to ban fixed anchors, mostly with poor results. In 2012 in North Cascades, rangers removed two fixed anchors on the very popular West Ridge of Forbidden Peak and established a total ban on the use of any bolts throughout the park, including the replacement of existing anchors that may be failing due to age and weathering. Less than a year later a climber was killed by rockfall, and the location the climber was in was due to the missing anchors.

In Nevada's Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, all fixed anchor installation has been banned, and an unwieldy process for replacing existing anchors was instituted. This did not stop new route development - people still put up new routes, publish them, and these routes are climbed by others. No one takes credit for the new routes to avoid prosecution. Also, no one complains, these anchors have no impact on the other park users. Bolts, expansion anchors drilled by hand and placed in solid rock, are very low impact anchors. They are far less visible than wads of nylon webbing wrapped around rock features, the other primary form of fixed descent anchors. Worse still, slings around trees damage the vegetation and may lead to the death of the tree. Bolts are arguably safer AND better for the wilderness environment.

This inappropriate policy revision, proposed by folks who want to legislate from afar the critical safety issues climbers must pay attention to, should be rejected. Fixed anchors have been allowed and managed for decades, and their use has no negative impact on wilderness users or the essential wilderness experience. Please do not adopt this policy.