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First name: Josh

Last name: Helling

Organization: Yosemite Mountaineering School

Title: Director

Comments: Dear USFS,

My name is Josh Helling, and I am a Wilderness First Responder, Leave No Trace Trainer, certified Mountain Rescue Technician, certified American Mountain Guide, and the Director of Yosemite Mountaineering School. As an older climber and steward of the Wilderness, I am highly concerned about the potential ban on fixed anchors if they are listed as "Prohibited installations". I have been climbing in wilderness areas since 1987, and I have a deep spiritual connection to my life mainly because of the historically accepted practices of safe, sustainable climbing ethics in Wilderness areas. Profound wilderness climbing experiences with my father as a child, and now with children of my own have greatly influenced myself to be an outdoor educator and responsible steward of the wilderness. I greatly desire to protect, and preserve the wilderness for future generations to come. I am also aware that past leaders of wilderness protection and wilderness preservation also experienced profound wilderness experiences with friends, and family through steep mountain travel, or rock climbing activities. In order to continue with wilderness protection and preservation, it is critical to allow future generations unconfined opportunities to connect with nature in a variety of wild places that are only accessible with rope, and sometimes fixed anchor access.

Historically, climbers have had a self-regulating code of conduct based on protecting the environment they appreciate so much. Wilderness preservation is a top priority for the American climbing community, and climbers are often leaders in supporting responsible recreation on public land. Climbers are traditionally problem solvers, and they have gone as far as to engineer what is known as clean climbing equipment that fits into cracks with zero alteration to the rock in order to protect the environment. Most of the time these clean climbing tools are removed after use, but sometimes they need to be left in place in order to securely ascend the mountain, or rappel back down to safety of the ground. The decision to remove, or leave fixed anchors for safety concerns needs to be the decision of the individual at risk at that very moment, not by someone else deciding for them.

As a professional outdoor educator and a manager of public safety, my primary job duty is to teach, demonstrate, promote, and mentor, safe, clean, climbing techniques as much as possible. Encouraging Leave No Trace principles is the foundation to all of our Yosemite Mountaineering School outdoor education programs, climbing classes, and guided climbs. In our teachings, leaving fixed anchors behind is considered a last resort tool, but sometimes a necessary tool in order to be a safe, responsible climber in the wilderness.

As a Wilderness, first responder, and Mountain Rescue Technician, my duty to act begins with avoiding injury or death. In order to responsibly do this, our team members need freedom to make good decisions based on risk management. Various types of anchor inspection is a constant part of staying alive, keeping other people alive, and protecting the public from unnecessary injury or fatal accidents. Recognizing anchor hazard as a stop and fix is critical to sound decision making, but if the National Park Service and U.S. Forest service moves forward with a fixed anchor ban, there will be an alarming increase in climbing accidents, climbing fatalities, and emergency service response. The number of technical rescues, injuries, deaths, and stranded wilderness users will rise. These unnecessary human catastrophes will have detrimental, negative effects on land management assigned to those Wilderness areas as well. Included in these avoidable catastrophes will be the devastating impacts upon surviving family members, and friends of the unfortunate victims due to public land decision makers. Do you want that blood on your hands? Do you want to assume responsibility for an avoidable increase of loss of life in the same places America cherishes as unconfined wilderness? I have personally seen pools of blood at the base of cliffs where climber made judgment errors of trusting minimal and inadequate safety equipment which is the direction you will be pushing all climbers. I have witnessed the deep depression of survivor's guilt of family, friends, and first responders that lasts a lifetime. I beg and plead with you to do the right thing by not pursuing a fixed anchor ban. Please allow the continued pursuit of clean climbing to be the goal with an ability to still utilize a

safety option of fixed anchors when necessary.

Sincerely,
Josh Helling