

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/31/2024 3:28:06 AM

First name: Angela

Last name: Foley

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express my deep concern and opposition to the proposed ban on fixed anchors in Wilderness areas. Fixed anchors are an essential component of climbers' safety systems and, as outlined by the Wilderness Act, they do not fall under the category of prohibited "installations"; I believe that adhering to existing climbing policies, which have allowed for the judicious use of fixed anchors for over half a century, is the most effective way to protect Wilderness character while facilitating primitive and unconfined Wilderness climbing.

It is unreasonable for federal agencies to introduce new guidance policies that prohibit Wilderness climbing anchors nationwide, especially when these agencies have historically permitted, managed, and authorized fixed anchors for decades. The climbing community has responsibly undertaken the maintenance of fixed anchors, ensuring their safety and functionality. Prohibiting fixed anchors could create safety issues by imposing unnecessary obstacles to regular maintenance efforts, which are often undertaken on short notice. Critical safety decisions must be made promptly, and any authorization process should not impede those decisions. The management of fixed anchor maintenance needs to be structured to incentivize safe replacements and prevent the removal of climbing routes.

Additionally, prohibiting fixed anchors poses a threat to the appropriate exploration of Wilderness areas. Land managers should allow climbers to explore these areas in a manner that permits in-the-moment decisions necessary when navigating complex vertical terrain. This flexibility is crucial for ensuring the safety of climbers and preserving the unique experience of exploring Wilderness environments.

Furthermore, a ban on fixed anchors could jeopardize America's rich climbing legacy and erase some of the world's greatest climbing achievements. Climbing management policy should prioritize the protection of existing routes from removal, ensuring the continuation of our climbing heritage.

Lastly, restricting the establishment of new routes to "existing climbing opportunities" on non-Wilderness lands is unenforceable and will create confusion amongst land managers and climbers. Non-Wilderness climbing management policy should maintain opportunities for new anchors unless and until analyses determine climbing should be restricted to protect cultural and natural resources.

In conclusion, I strongly urge the Forest Service to reconsider the proposed ban on fixed anchors in Wilderness areas. By respecting the historical use of fixed anchors, prioritizing safety, and preserving our climbing legacy, we can strike a balance that protects both climbers and the pristine nature of our Wilderness areas.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I trust that the Forest Service will carefully consider the concerns raised by the climbing community.