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Comments: I am writing in response to the Climbing Opportunities project for wilderness areas.

For many years now, the US has been at the forefront of wilderness protection worldwide. Sports such as climbing and canyoneering have grown up alongside America's wilderness system and provided an important example of how people can interact with their protected lands in a way that preserves their essential beauty, ecological value, and wildness.

The proposed regulatory changes threaten that progress. They penalize a large number of conscientious users, preventing them from accessing and enjoying their federal wilderness lands in a safe way. They threaten America's standing as the defacto home of the worldwide climbing community and will provide little, if any, tangible benefit to the protection and preservation of these areas, while creating additional burden for the Forest Service.

As both a climber and canyoneer, I have used many fixed anchors in wilderness areas. They have always been crucial to making wilderness travel safer and minimizing user impact on the environment. Bolts help reduce the number of accidents and SAR rescues that have to happen in the backcountry. They allow climbers and canyoneers to establish safe routes that avoid fragile habitats and utilize durable surfaces.

What climbers and canyoneers could really use is more clear guidance from land managers on how to place fixed anchors in a way that is safe and not environmentally disruptive. This is a community that is deeply concerned with preserving the sanctity of the wilderness and minimizing human impact. No climber wants to place bolts in a way that is destructive to the environment. Guidance and education help climbers make the best decisions in the moment. Regulations increase the likelihood of poorly maintained, dangerous hardware and illegal anchors being established by the least responsible members of the community.

Instead of applying disruptive new rules that compromise safety and create confusing, often unenforceable regulatory structures that tax USFS resources, help us understand how we can bolt in the best way. Don't put wilderness users in a place where they have to have to decide between reasonable personal safety and responsible wilderness use (replacing old bolts, placing safe route protection) and breaking the law.

For decades, American climbers and canyoneers have proven that they can manage the establishment and maintenance of fixed anchors while respecting and protecting their federal wilderness lands, and the partnership has been incredibly productive. Guidance and outreach can help this successful partnership continue to flourish, while the proposed regulations are an unreasonable change to an already working system.