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Climbing & Fixed Anchors in Wilderness

RESULT

Draft Recommendations for Management of Climbing  
& Fixed Anchors in Wilderness

DISCLAIMER

The following recommendations were prepared by the Working Group on Climbing & Fixed Anchors in Wilderness. Not all participants in this Working Group were present when the following version of these recommendations was drafted. The agreements which permitted these recommendations to be drafted represent only the opinions and understandings of the participants on this Working Group, acting on their own personal authority, and do not represent the formal positions of any agency, business, or interest group.

*"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings "*

*-- John Muir*

## INTRODUCTION

The following recommendations acknowledge and honor the unique and special qualities of federally designated and proposed wilderness areas, as well as Wilderness Study Areas. In these areas, it is recognized that the federal land manager's primary responsibility is to prevent the impairment of wilderness resources and wilderness character, and to preserve the wilderness for the future enjoyment of wilderness users.

## FOR CONSIDERATION

- Within wilderness areas, wilderness climbing offers " outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation "

\*\* Climbing has a long history as a major use of wilderness areas in all regions of the country. Leaders of agencies which manage wilderness, and of wilderness advocacy groups, were among the earliest climbers in wilderness areas.

\*\* National and regional climbing organizations were a prominent part of the national coalition which succeeded, after an eight-year effort, in achieving enactment of the Wilderness Act in 1964.

- Like most human uses of wilderness, wilderness climbing can be dangerous. Like many other wilderness users, climbers provide for their own protection through activity-specific safety equipment and techniques.
- Fixed anchors are now common equipment for certain types of wilderness climbing in certain kinds of terrain, having replaced previously-used equipment (pitons) which had greater adverse impact on the resource.
- Fixed anchors are not "permanent improvements", rather, they are temporary "installations" which make possible the reasonably safe use of wilderness -- as wilderness -- by climbers.
- Fixed anchors, where appropriate, must be "substantially unnoticeable" and must not have a substantial adverse impact on the "primeval character and influence" of the wilderness area.
- In specific terrain within a specific wilderness area, fixed anchors are "installations" which "are necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purposes of this [Wilderness] Act", the purposes of which include providing "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation" such as wilderness climbing.
- Climbing, including the infrequent use of fixed anchors, in a manner that does not significantly impact wilderness resources or values, is an historic and appropriate type of primitive recreation in wilderness areas.

## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- The wilderness planning process, including public participation and application of the Limits of Acceptable Change management concept, should be used to determine an acceptable level of fixed anchor use while preserving wilderness resources and values in a specific wilderness area. The resulting wilderness plan should incorporate this information to determine the appropriate level of fixed anchor use for that wilderness area.

- In determining whether fixed anchors should be allowed in specific terrain within a specific wilderness area, the wilderness manager should determine that these will be

" minimum ", that is, ' substantially unnoticeable ",  
an insignificant impact on the " wilderness character "  
of the area, and the minimum tool " necessary to meet  
minimum requirements for the administration of the  
area ", and

" necessary ", that is, essential for the reasonably safe  
exercise of " a primitive and unconfined type of  
recreation " by wilderness climbers

These determinations should be made with maximum public involvement, including the climbing community, in locally prepared management plans tailored to each wilderness area.

- Based on the findings of the wilderness planning process, options for management of fixed anchors may include, but are not limited to, resource impact monitoring, voluntary limits on use, user education, use restrictions, permitting, area closures, and removal.

## IMPLEMENTATION

It must be recognized that the effective management of climbing and fixed anchors in wilderness will be greatly facilitated by the understanding, support, and cooperation of all interested parties

In order to create a partnership that addresses the concerns of all interested parties, the following elements should be considered

- In managing climbing and fixed anchors in wilderness, education should be emphasized over regulation
- The use of Memorandums of Understanding and contractual agreements involving all interested parties should be considered as a tool for management of climbing in wilderness
- A wilderness ethic should be promoted to educate climbers on appropriate wilderness-sensitive practices
- Opportunities should be provided for voluntary involvement of climbers in minimizing and mitigating impacts in wilderness