

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 2, 2024

Director Charles F. Sams III
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Chief Randy Moore
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Director Sams and Chief Moore,

We write regarding the draft directives on climbing activities issued by the National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), specifically regarding the new analysis process for fixed anchors in wilderness. Climbing, including climbing with fixed anchors, has long been recognized by your agencies as an appropriate activity within wilderness areas. As you finalize the directives, we urge you to emphasize that climbing remains an appropriate activity in wilderness as long as it is conducted in accordance with applicable laws, and that removals of fixed anchors on a pre-existing route should be rare. The final guidance should explicitly state that a pre-existing route with a pending analysis is not illegal to maintain or climb. Furthermore, we urge you to take steps to expedite reviews of fixed anchors and climbing routes as much as possible, ensure public notice regarding the status of such reviews, and increase opportunities for meaningful stakeholder engagement.

Rock climbing is enjoyed by individuals at every proficiency level, from kids to professional athletes. For decades, fixed anchors such as bolts and pitons have helped enhance climber safety in wilderness areas. We appreciate the acknowledgement in the draft directives of a continued role for fixed anchors, both existing and new. Treating fixed anchors as inconsistent with wilderness values would pose serious concerns for recreational economies and safety. It is crucial that the final guidelines make it clear that climbers will not be prohibited from using fixed anchors while analysis of a climbing route is pending, nor from replacing unsafe anchors without exiting the climb.

Given stakeholder concerns regarding well-loved existing routes—not to mention potential new routes—we support the use of programmatic planning tools in order to provide procedural clarity as swiftly as possible. Although case-by-case analyses of fixed anchors may be warranted in some instances, we believe that large-scale planning efforts will generally result in the fastest climbing management plans, and we encourage both agencies to incorporate broader scale programmatic analyses where possible in the final directives. Analyzing each individual route and anchor nationwide would be excessive and would lead to long delays and a lack of certainty for the climbers that depend on them. The agencies should provide regular public updates on the

status of any assessments of routes and anchors, as well as ample public notice for any proposed changes to existing routes. In rare cases where removal of anchors is advised, public notice or comment is essential to prevent significant danger to climbers who may have planned their route around those anchors.

The agencies should increase engagement with Tribes, local governments, recreation advocates, and the conservation community as the draft guidance is amended, as well as during the assessments of routes and anchors. We are aware that climbing and wilderness advocates are asking your agencies for open and continued dialogue on these directives, and we encourage you to fully engage with these groups on their request.

Accessible and safe outdoor recreation opportunities on our public lands offer benefits to individuals and local economies, and they should remain available to all Americans. Both the Senate and House of Representatives have taken up bipartisan legislation protecting the judicious use of fixed anchors in wilderness areas. Safeguarding our nation's designated wilderness areas while providing access to unconfined recreation—a value recognized in the Wilderness Act—is essential. Climbing has a long history of compatibility with wilderness. We urge you to finalize your directives, and complete any required analysis of routes and fixed anchors, with this tenet at the core.

Sincerely,



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Joe Manchin
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator