

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 30, 2024

The Honorable Secretary Deb Haaland  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Secretary Thomas Vilsack  
Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretaries Haaland and Vilsack:

We write to express our concern with the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) proposed draft guidance on the management of climbing activities in designated wilderness areas. As written, the NPS' draft Wilderness Stewardship Reference Manual directive and the USFS' proposed draft guidance on the use and maintenance of fixed anchors in wilderness areas make significant policy changes that would restrict climbing safety practices. We ask that the agencies provide a briefing to the signed Members on the status and proposed changes to climbing management practices before finalized any associated guidance.

While intended to provide over eight million American climbers with clear guidance on the use of fixed anchors to maintain wilderness area protections, we are concerned the policy changes would unnecessarily burden our National Parks' and Forests' already strained budgets, limit access to these special places, and endanger climbers. Deferred maintenance backlogs and workforce challenges in our National Parks and Forests only stand to exacerbate the implementation of these policies should they be finalized as drafted.

Also, we are concerned that the proposed guidance from the NPS and USFS would, in part, break from long established climbing management standards by classifying fixed anchors as installations and therefore prohibiting fixed anchors in wilderness areas unless a minimum requirements analysis (MRA) is completed and the forest or park provides specific administrative exceptions for every existing and future climbing route that requires fixed anchors to ascend or descend safely. We are hearing that this new determination could threaten over a century of precedent, hinder the establishment of new climbing routes, and complicate maintenance of fixed anchors. This means access to some of America's most iconic climbing routes such as The Dawn Wall on El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, big walls in Utah's Zion National Park, adventures in the Wind River Range of Wyoming, many historic climbs in Washington's North Cascades, and climbing opportunities in Arkansas' Ozark-St. Francis National Forest could be limited.

Additionally, we are concerned that the guidance put forth by the NPS and USFS includes permitting policies that will add more red-tape and increase costs, without providing funding

support. The proposed process for providing administrative exceptions for fixed anchors, MRA, would require the re-evaluation of all climbing routes in wilderness areas with existing fixed anchors (over 50,000 climbing routes nationwide), among other arduous proposed changes to long-standing climbing management policies.

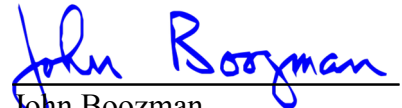
We believe that fixed anchors should not be considered installations in wilderness and urge the agencies to protect these fundamental safety tools. The outdoor recreation and climbing communities share the goal of establishing policies that maintain sustainable access to and protection of treasured wilderness areas. Finalizing these proposed changes jeopardizes access to our public lands and puts the climbing community at risk.

Thank you for your consideration. We believe that fixed anchors should not be prohibited in wilderness and urge the agencies to publish new guidance for public comment that does not prohibit these fundamental safety tools. The signed Members also look forward to a timely briefing on the status of proposed changes to climbing management practices before finalizing any associated guidance.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



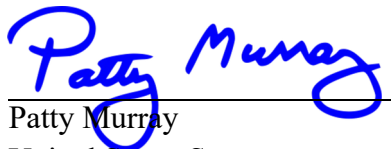
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United States Senator



Joe Manchin III  
United States Senator



John Barrasso  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



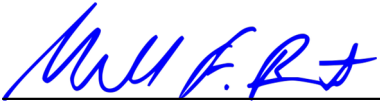
Mike Crapo  
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