

JARED POLIS
GOVERNOR



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November 29, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Protecting Colorado Climbing Areas and the Recreation Economy

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack,

Colorado's recreation legacy is a source of pride. We are privileged to live in a state that has no rival when it comes to our iconic natural landscapes. From our 22 million acres of public land, 105,344 miles of rivers, 690 peaks over 13,000 feet, and expansive vistas of prairies, mountain valleys, and desert canyons, these spaces are central to Colorado's lifestyle, heritage, identity, and world-class recreation economy. Colorado's outdoor recreation industry accounts for \$9.6 billion in value-added (GDP) annually and contributed 120,000 direct jobs in 2020. Colorado's outdoor economy contributes to a higher quality of life, making people and communities happier and healthier.

Rock climbing is important to our state; not only because of the flourishing home grown climbing industry, but also because of a century of inspirational climbing achievements on Colorado public lands and by Coloradans around the world. The recent Camp Hale and Continental Divide National Monument designation celebrates Colorado's climbing history by protecting the 10th Mountain Division training ground where early climbing techniques and equipment were developed. The climbing community has been a powerful and long standing advocate for the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Enhancement (CORE) Act, which laid the groundwork for the designation of the new Monument. And I hope that climbers and mountaineers will continue to be powerful allies for future conservation efforts here in Colorado.

I understand that the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service are considering a proposal to prohibit fixed anchors in designated Wilderness as "installations". I believe this would be a serious mistake, and I urge you to ensure that this does not happen. Arapahoe and Roosevelt National Forests and Rocky Mountain and Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Parks, just to name a few, serve as modern day proving grounds

for America's best rock and alpine climbers, as well as destinations for hundreds of thousands of recreational climbers of all abilities and backgrounds. Climbing fixed anchors are critical tools for navigating technical terrain in Wilderness and are essential for climbing some of Colorado's most iconic features, such as The Diamond on Longs Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park, which was first ascended in 1960. These tiny installations in rock, made of inert metals, have not been demonstrated to have any adverse impact on habitat or wildlife. If there is something being done in Wilderness that purports to be a fixed anchor but is actually a more disruptive fixture, then define and allow a definition of fixed anchors that is commercially standard.

Furthermore, I was the House sponsor of the legislation providing Rocky Mountain National Park with its Wilderness designation and the sponsor of the first iterations of the now CORE Act, among numerous other conservation and wilderness preservation efforts. These pieces of legislation were developed and promoted under the long-standing system of classifying fixed anchors within wilderness areas and the proposed change would run counter to that legislative intent for many areas. Furthermore, I am deeply concerned about the impact this would have on the ability to manage and designate future wilderness areas, an effort we must continue to undertake in the face of climate change, impacts to nature and biodiversity and in efforts consistent with the administration's own America The Beautiful initiative.

If a prohibition on fixed anchors was implemented, all existing fixed anchors would be prohibited by law unless and until land management agencies determine that they are entitled to a statutory exception under Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. The exception process is wasteful and unnecessary because federal agencies already have the authority to successfully manage sustainable climbing in Colorado Wilderness areas.

We should be doing everything we can right now to grow the coalition of champions for public lands and to support our land management agencies in responding to climate change and taking care of the places entrusted to our care. In contrast, a new prohibition on fixed anchors in Wilderness would jeopardize the safety of climbers, harm our recreation economy here in Colorado, establish unnecessary bureaucracy, and restrict access to some of the wildest places in America.

Thank you for considering my concerns over the potential prohibition of fixed anchors in Wilderness. Put simply, fixed anchors have been and should continue to be entirely consistent with Wilderness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jared Polis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jared Polis
Governor
State of Colorado