

April 10, 2023

Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

As you know, outdoor recreation is a vibrant part of our economy, and hundreds of millions of visitors access our treasured public lands each year. Rock climbing is an important part of the outdoor recreation community – not just because of the tremendous economic value the climbing sector provides, but also because of the inspiring achievements of climbers in Colorado and nationwide.


We understand that the National Park Service is in the early stages of a process to develop guidance on climbing in wilderness areas. As you conduct that process, we urge you to ensure that the climbing community can continue its decades-long tradition of safely enjoying our beautiful outdoor spaces, including through the continued use and maintenance of fixed anchors. Fixed anchors are imperative to ensuring climbers can safely recreate. We have heard concerns that the interpretation of fixed anchors as “installations” could lead to a presumption that all fixed anchors are prohibited by default, which would make it exceedingly difficult to maintain safe, well-loved climbing routes. The ability for climbers to continue to rely on existing fixed anchors and to immediately address maintenance issues with fixed anchors while on a climbing route—all without fear of running afoul of NPS requirements—will ensure safety for climbers and guides, which should be a fundamental objective of the forthcoming guidance.

Protecting our nation’s designated wilderness areas remains a priority. We fully support the preservation of significant cultural and ecological sites in wilderness and recognize the need for NPS to protect natural resources. We also support striking the proper balance between preservation and safe access – climbing has long been an activity considered compatible with wilderness designations and must remain that way.

Overly-strict guidance regarding use and maintenance of fixed anchors would jeopardize the safety of climbers, threaten local economies, and unduly limit one of the most exhilarating recreational activities available on our public lands. Providing safe opportunities to experience our prized landscapes is critical as we work to protect our wild places.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue – we eagerly anticipate hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Hickenlooper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J".

John Hickenlooper
United States Senator