

March 8, 2023

## **Support for Protect America's Rock Climbing Act**

The undersigned organizations support the Protect America's Rock Climbing Act that will protect against unnecessarily restricting rock climbing, mountaineering, and backcountry skiing opportunities in America's wilderness areas.

Federal land management agencies manage approximately 60% of America's climbing areas which totals approximately 20,000 discrete cliffs, boulders and alpine objectives inside and outside of designated wilderness. This collection of American climbing areas represents some of the best climbing in the world and has provided inspiration for generations of American conservationists.

Currently the National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) are considering new and unprecedented land management policies that would consider fixed anchors as prohibited "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Climbing fixed anchors are critical tools for navigating technical terrain in wilderness and are essential for rock climbing, mountaineering and backcountry skiing in some of America's most iconic public lands, such as El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, Long's Peak in Rocky Mountain National Park, and Wyoming's Wind River Mountains.

A national prohibition on fixed anchors in wilderness would jeopardize the safety of climbers, harm our recreation economy (rock climbing is a \$12 billion industry according to the Outdoor Industry Association), contradict the purposes of the Wilderness Act, waste taxpayer dollars, and restrict access to some of the wildest places in America. If the NPS and USFS implemented this new interpretation of the Wilderness Act, the federal land agencies will be overwhelmed with having to make site-specific decisions for every existing fixed anchor in wilderness, potentially erasing critical pieces of American climbing history because the federal government has allowed the conditional use of fixed anchors since the 1930s.

Importantly, this proposed new prohibition on fixed anchors is unnecessary because USFS and NPS already have the management tools—supported by the climbing community—to effectively regulate climbing and protect wilderness character. Federal land agencies have developed national-level policy to manage fixed anchors in wilderness without making the legal conclusion that fixed anchors are banned "installations" under the Wilderness Act. Also, outfitters, guides, recreation-dependent gateway communities, and recreational climbers will all have to deal with unprecedented uncertainty as to whether or not longstanding fixed anchors will be maintained and available for continued use. This uncertainty will have adverse impacts on small businesses and the outdoor recreation economy at a time when many policy makers around the country are looking to promote rural economic development.

Protect America's Rock Climbing Act will establish consistency between federal agencies and support sustainable wilderness management by making clear that climbing and the use, placement, and replacement of climbing anchors are an "allowable activity" within America's wilderness areas, subject to reasonable rules and regulations to protect wilderness character.

Climbers deeply appreciate wilderness and support restrictions that protect wilderness resources and character. But this new interpretation of the Wilderness Act would overturn nearly

60 years of precedent and create a new presumption of illegality that sends a strong signal to climbers and other human-powered recreationists that they are no longer welcome in America's wilderness areas. Recreation and conservation organizations have historically worked in partnership to establish some of our most significant conservation gains such as the Great American Outdoors Act, and the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act. Establishing a dangerous policy that makes climbers and mountaineers unwelcome in wilderness will damage critical relationships and weaken support for conservation and public lands.

For the aforementioned reasons, the following signatories support the Protect America's Rock Climbing Act to preserve the unique world-class wilderness climbing opportunities found only on America's public lands.

Signed,

*Access Fund*

*Outdoor Alliance*

*American Mountain Guide Association*

*American Alpine Club*

*American Whitewater*

*Boulder Climbing Community*

*Salt Lake Climbers Alliance*

*American Canoe Association*

*The Mountaineers*

*Winter Wildlands Alliance*

*Coalition of American Canyoneers*

*Kent Mountain Adventure Center (KMAC) Guides*

*Carolina Climbers Coalition*

*Friends of Indian Creek*

*Colorado Mountain Club*

*Cliffhanger Guides*

*Vertical Adventures Rock Climbing School*

*Southeastern Climbers Coalition*

*New River Alliance of Climbers*

*Friends of Joshua Tree*

*Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition*

*East Tennessee Climbers Coalition*

*Red River Gorge Climbers' Coalition*

#### Quotes:

From Access Fund Press Release:

“Access Fund’s core mission is to protect America’s climbing, and we’re thrilled to help craft and support a new bill that would do just that: the Protect America’s Rock Climbing Act. Thanks to the incredible leadership of Representatives Curtis and Neguse, we have an opportunity to protect Wilderness climbing and America’s exceptional climbing history.

“The bipartisan Protect America’s Rock Climbing Act is anchored to the benefits of rock climbing, which is good for our health, rural economies, and our public lands. It’s also a testament to the growing power of the climbing advocacy movement, which is dedicated to protecting the land through smart climbing management policy that ensures sustainable access for climbers.” - Access Fund Executive Director Chris Winter

“Colorado’s natural areas are home to some world-renowned rock climbing locations. By requiring additional agency guidance on climbing management, we are taking steps to protect our climbers and the spaces in which they recreate. I am thankful to Rep. Curtis for his continued partnership in our efforts to bolster outdoor recreation, and am glad to join him in introducing this legislation.” - Congressman Joe Neguse

“In Utah, recreation on public lands is a large and ever-growing industry. Ensuring access to these lands is vital not just for our economy, but also to ensure the millions of Americans who enjoy rock climbing can fully explore our nation’s national treasures.” - Congressman John Curtis

"Outdoor Alliance supports human-powered recreation, public lands protection, and conservation. Therefore, we applaud Congressman Curtis and Congressman Neguse for introducing the Protect America’s Rock Climbing Act. For generations, climbers have converted their passion for the outdoors into advocacy, and have been a key player in the conservation movement. The Protect America’s Rock Climbing Act recognizes the long history of climbing on our public lands and ensures sustainable protection for all forms of climbing. We strongly support these critical steps to protect sustainable climbing on public lands." - Adam Cramer, Outdoor Alliance CEO

"As a professional climber and conservationist, I am excited about the Protect America’s Rock Climbing Act. It is fitting that Congressman Curtis and Congressman Neguse, champions for recreation and conservation, are leading out on protecting American climbing for future generations. It is a privilege to climb on our public lands, and we need to respect the Wilderness, environment, and Indigenous values when practicing the beautiful art of climbing. This common-sense bill promotes sustainable and safe climbing, protects historic climbing areas like the Diamond in Rocky Mountain National Park and El Capitan in Yosemite National

Park, and helps ensure that climbers will continue to be active conservationists and public land advocates.” - Tommy Caldwell, Professional Climber and CO D-2 resident

"As a business owner in CO district 2, I am proud of Congressman Neguse and Congressman Curtis for introducing an important bill that protects climbing, promotes conservation ethics, and improves the economy in gateway communities such as Estes Park. KMAC Guides believe that America needs to promote healthy recreation, deeper connections with nature, and recreation-based economies, so we are thrilled to support the Protect America's Rock Climbing Act." - Dustin Dyer, KMAC Guides Owner