Date: 8/4/2021
To: Bitterroot National Forest Climbing Management Plan planners
From: Western Montana Climbers Coalition and Access Fund
RE: Suggested Bitterroot National Forest CMP

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The US National Forest System values recreation and considers rock climbing a legitimate recreation activity. There are currently only three USFS Climbing Management Plans (CMP): White Mountains NF, Pike and San Isabel NF and Mark Twain NF. All of the USFS CMPs were developed in collaboration between the USFS and local climbing organizations and align with the mission of the USFS.

Bitterroot National Forest's unique climbing resources, ecosystem, cultural resources, wildlife patterns, visitor flow patterns, and land designations dictate a site-specific approach to climbing management. The following framework and language for a Bitterroot NF CMP is mostly based on the Pike and Isabel NF and Mark Twain NF CMPs (the White Mountains NF CMP pertains to the Rumney climbing area which is vastly different in nature and visitation levels than Bitterroot NF).

The following CMP sections are organized to correspond with the content of the Bitterroot National Forest's online CMP story map.

Cultural and Historic Resources

- Never climb on cultural or historic resources, including petroglyphs and pictographs.
- Leave any cultural and paleontological resource discoveries intact and in place.
- Immediately notify the forest service district ranger by telephone of the discovery of any culturally significant objects including antiquities or other objects of historic or scientific interest, including but not limited to historic or prehistoric ruins, fossils, or artifacts.

Natural Resources

Wildlife
- Impacts from climbing activities should be monitored and assessed regularly to ascertain needed management adaption or necessary improvements.
- The USFS welcomes input from climbers about observations of any wildlife or rare plants at climbing areas to enhance local understanding of the ecology of cliff communities.
- Temporary closures may be used to protect nesting raptors during critical phases of the courtship, nesting, and fledging periods. Closures will generally begin in early spring. Raptor activity should be monitored and those areas or routes with current raptor use may be closed. Other areas where activity is discovered may also be closed. Closures will be in effect long enough to ensure protection and non-disturbance of the birds.
- Raptor closure time period and spatial extent will be based on viewshed from the active nest site, and may vary depending on the species, nest site, topography and other conditions. Access Fund's, "Climbing and Raptors: A Handbook for Adaptive Raptor Management provides a science-based model for protecting raptors during critical periods.
- Closures may also be utilized for other wildlife and rare plant protection as necessary.
- Restrictions and closures for resource protection will be posted at the local Ranger District offices, and as possible, online, and on the ground near logical access points. WMTCC will share closure notices and educate the climbing community on resource protection.

Vegetation

- Removal of vegetation from the base of climbs, belay ledges, or bouldering areas is strongly discouraged.
- While it is understood that some limited loss of vegetation is likely to occur at established climbing areas, care must be taken to minimize such loss. Where necessary, vegetation removal should establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use.
- The removal of vegetation from cracks or rock faces to allow a route to become more climbable is strongly discouraged.
- When using trees as natural anchors, care must be taken to prevent damage to the tree.

Rock Alteration

- The removal of rock from its natural position will be allowed only when the rock to be removed poses a significant risk to the climbing party or a future climbing party.
- Chipping, gluing or attaching artificial holds is strictly prohibited.

New Route Establishment

- Fixed anchors are defined by the USFS as climbing equipment (e.g., bolts, pitons, or slings) left in place to facilitate ascent or descent of technical terrain. These anchors are a critical component of a climber's safety system. Fixed anchors are typically placed by the first ascentionist on technical ascents and descents (rappels) where removable anchor placements are not viable.
- Nothing in this plan prohibits the use and maintenance of fixed anchors, including any fixed anchor established before the date of the enactment of this plan.
- Rock climbing fixed anchors can be placed in such a way to protect natural resources, improve social conditions, enhance safety, and provide outstanding recreational opportunities.
- The placement of non-standard climbing hardware is discouraged. Following the American Safe Climbing Association guidance on fixed anchor standards is encouraged.
- Modern, commercially available, climbing specific hangers and bolts of a length adequate for the rock conditions are recommended.
- The use of reflective hardware is strongly discouraged, especially in areas where conflict with other user groups is most likely to occur such as near multi-use trails, developed sites or viewpoints.
- Camouflaging fixed anchors to match natural rock color is encouraged.
- When replacing unsafe fixed anchors, recommended hardware will be used whenever possible. A reasonable effort to remove the existing, unsafe hardware will be made and existing drill holes will be used in the installation of replacement fixed anchors whenever possible.

Social Considerations

- Climbers are encouraged to be sensitive to the value of natural quiet for wildlife and other visitors (e.g., when using voice signals and gathering at the base of climbs). Use of rock hammers or drills is strongly discouraged during sensitive times for wildlife (e.g. breeding, nesting, fledging periods) and should be used judiciously in areas where other visitors may be disturbed.
- Climbers are encouraged to be sensitive to the value of the visual resource. The visual impacts of fixed anchors can be managed by camouflaging equipment. The visual impacts of chalk use can be managed through educating climbers on reducing the use of chalk, cleaning after themselves, and encouraging chalk clean-up projects in high-use areas.

- Levels of use should be monitored. Management action may be utilized to address measurable and unacceptable changes to a range of resource conditions (e.g., physical, biological, social).
- The climbing community and land managers will work together to mitigate unacceptable changes to resource conditions.

Management Considerations/Wilderness

- Climbing in designated Wilderness, within the limits of existing agency regulations and policy is considered unrestricted, unless certain areas are clearly identified as being restricted or closed.
- Climbing practices should preserve the "qualities of wilderness character", as required by the Wilderness Act of 1964, which are "untrammeled, undeveloped, outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation, and other features of value".
- Any climbing use or related activity may be restricted or prohibited when its occurrence, continuation or expansion would result in unacceptable impacts to wilderness resources or interfere significantly with the experience of other visitors.
- The use of power drills (and other motorized equipment) is prohibited in designated Wilderness.
- Clean climbing techniques should be the norm in wilderness. Removable, temporary climbing protection and anchors that do not alter the environment (e.g. slings, cams, nuts, chocks, stoppers) should be utilized when possible. Fixed anchors should be placed infrequently and only when removable protection opportunities are unavailable.
- When descending, the placement of new fixed anchors is acceptable, to enable a safe rappel when no other means of descent is possible, or to enable emergency retreat during self-rescue situations.
- Storing equipment, including fixed ropes, is not allowed.