



Protect America's Climbing

Climbing on Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest: General Comments for Forest Plan Revision

Overview

- Climbing--rock climbing, ice climbing, bouldering--is a highly valued, historic and widely popular use of Nantahala and Pisgah National Forest (NPNF). The history of climbing on Forest areas goes back to at least the 1930s. Preliminary Access Fund and Outdoor Alliance visitor use estimates are at
- Climbing areas in the NPNF are among the most visited and popular climbing resources in the East. The Forest provides residents and visitors alike with dozens of individual climbing sites and an enormous diversity of year-round climbing experiences and settings, from front-country bouldering, to Wilderness multi-pitch climbing, to winter ice climbing.
- Climbing is a major part of Western North Carolina's outdoor recreation economy which supports specialized industries, camping/lodging, food and retail businesses. The Forest's climbing areas also host thousands of paying guided clients, summer campers, and other outdoor program attendees from colleges and institutions across the Southeast. An Outdoor Alliance economic impact study will be completed by September and results will be shared publicly.
- Climbing like other forms of outdoor recreation is beneficial for public health. Climbing has recognized benefits for physical and mental health and is an effective way to get youth outside and increase their connection to the outdoors.

Management recommendations

- Improve general recognition, monitoring and inventory of climbing use and areas on the Forest. To support this effort, Access Fund and CCC have provided climbing area information as part of the plan revision process.
- **Stewardship**
 - Partner with CCC, AF and local climbers to address the need for more stewardship of designated trails, climber access routes, and climbing areas.
 - Access routes that are not part of the Forest's designated trail system (social trails) are critical to providing recreational access to dispersed recreation sites like climbing areas, scenic overlooks, and access for fishing and hunting. We recommend utilizing erosion control activities to sustainably manage the access routes used by climbers and other recreationists.

- **Fixed anchors**

- Use, placement and replacement of fixed anchors are essential for climbing and resource management. Fixed anchors are an inherent part of climbing on federally managed lands across the U.S. AF and CCC recommend NPNF adopt and include our fixed anchor guidance, based on other USFS management plans and the USFS definition of fixed anchors.

- **Non Wilderness Management Areas**

Use, placement and replacement of fixed anchors are essential for climbing and resource management. Fixed anchors are appropriate and should be allowed where necessary; and to enable a rappel where no other safe means of descent are available, or where use of fixed anchors may reduce impacts to sensitive resources.

- **Wilderness**

Use, placement and replacement of fixed anchors are essential for climbing and resource management. Fixed anchors are appropriate and should be allowed where necessary, in areas impassable by the use of removable anchors, to enable a rappel where no other safe means of descent are available, or where use of fixed anchors may reduce impacts to sensitive resources. In Wilderness, any fixed anchors must be placed by hand drill.

- **Resource management**

- Continue the successful seasonal Peregrine Falcon closure management program, and maintain collaboration and communications with the climbing community. The recovery of Western N.C.'s Peregrine Falcon population is a great example of wildlife management and collaborative recreation management.
- Work with the climbing community on education and site specific management to ensure sensitive plant species are protected. Substantiate site closures and restrictions with monitoring, study and collaboration with climbing community.

- **Wilderness climbing**

- Climbing is a legitimate and appropriate use of USFS Wilderness. Climbing, including use of fixed anchors, predates the Wilderness Act in the U.S. and in Western N.C. areas which are now part of NPNF Wilderness. On NPNF Wilderness climbing areas represent an important and unique climbing resource.
- If placed by hand drill, fixed anchors are appropriate in Wilderness for resource management and where removable protection is not available. Maintenance of fixed anchors is also an important part of the climbing experience.
- Collaborate with AF and CCC on Wilderness Area climbing education and stewardship.