

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240
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March 15, 2007

In Reply Refer To:
6300 (172) P

EMS TRANSMISSION 03/20/2007
Instruction Memorandum No. 2007-084
Expires: 9/30/2008

To: All WO and Field Officials
From: Director, National Landscape Conservation System
Subject: Use of Permanent Fixed Anchors for Climbing in Designated Wilderness Areas
Managed by BLM

Purpose: This memorandum provides guidance on the use of permanent fixed anchors in BLM's designated Wilderness Areas. Permanent fixed anchors, commonly referred to as bolts, are used as safety devices by climbers. This memorandum also reaffirms the authority of BLM to manage climbing in Wilderness Areas including establishing restrictions or conditions for climbing.

Program Area: Wilderness Management, National Landscape Conservation System.

Policy: The BLM recognizes that climbing is a legitimate and appropriate use of BLM Wilderness Areas. Climbing, including the use of fixed anchors, has a history that predates the Wilderness Act, and Wilderness Areas represent a unique resource. This memorandum supplements BLM Manual 8560.

For the purposes of this memorandum, climbing includes rock, snow and ice climbing, mountaineering, canyoneering, and caving when equipment such as ropes and fixed or removable anchors are used to improve a climber's safety. "Permanent fixed anchor" is defined as hardware requiring the alteration of the rock where the placement is to occur. Permanent fixed anchors include bolts and pitons. This definition does not include temporary devices, such as slings, nuts, camming devices, and other removable anchors that do not alter rock surfaces.

The BLM has the authority to manage climbing activities in Wilderness Areas. Although climbing generally does not require an authorization permit, BLM may require a permit for climbing and activities associated with climbing on public lands. As established by the Wilderness Act and the BLM's regulations on management of designated Wilderness Areas found in 43 CFR 6302, climbers or others may not use power drills to place permanent fixed anchors in non-emergency situations. Climbers may use hand-powered drills to place permanent fixed anchors. Appendix 1 lists some of the relevant BLM authorities that apply to climbing in Wilderness Areas.

BLM should not allow climbing to cause unacceptable impacts on BLM Wilderness Areas. A manager may require visitors to get a permit or other authorization to replace or remove an existing permanent fixed anchor or place a new permanent fixed anchor. Managers may strive for low densities of climbing routes. Local BLM managers may prepare either Wilderness Management Plans or supplemental climbing management plans that include climbing management decisions. The BLM will develop these plans with the aid of public involvement and collaboration and will solicit public review and comment. Local BLM managers may also develop additional guidance on the use of permanent fixed anchors.

Local BLM managers may identify instances where the use of permanent fixed anchors is appropriate or inappropriate in Wilderness Areas. The following examples demonstrate cases where the use of permanent fixed anchors may be appropriate in Wilderness Areas:

- Using permanent fixed anchors to reduce impacts on vegetation or soils; or
- Placing a few permanent fixed anchors to improve climbers' safety on sections of routes where the use of removable hardware is not feasible.

The following examples demonstrate cases where the use of permanent fixed anchors may be inappropriate:

- Establishing new routes that contribute to an unacceptable density of climbing activity;
- Placing permanent fixed anchors on an existing climb that did not previously have permanent fixed anchors; or
- Installing a permanent fixed anchor near sensitive archaeological resources or raptor nesting site.

BLM may use its authority under 43 CFR 6302.19 and 8364.1 to undertake closures or restrictions. These regulations require a written determination by the local manager that such measures are needed to protect persons, property, and public lands or resources. The following are examples of cases where the use of such authority may be appropriate:

- Protect public health and safety;
- Prevent unacceptable impacts in Wilderness Areas; or
- Minimize visitor use conflicts.

Minimizing visual impact should be considered when placing permanent fixed anchors. The BLM encourages the use of bolt hangers painted in colors similar to the surrounding rock. The BLM instructs its managers to strongly encourage climbers to employ the principles of Leave No Trace to minimize the impact of climbing, including the removal of ropes and slings from permanent fixed anchors.

BLM regulations allow the placement of permanent fixed anchors in an emergency. In such a case, power drills may be used to place permanent fixed anchors (see 43 CFR 6303.1(d)).

Timeframe: This policy is effective upon issuance.

Background: Controversy has surrounded the issue of the use of permanent fixed anchors in

Wilderness Areas since the 1990s. In the absence of an overarching policy adopted by the Federal land-management agencies, the rock-climbing community has faced uncertainty about the use of permanent fixed anchors in BLM Wilderness Areas.

Budget Impact: None.

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: This IM supplements BLM Manual 8560, Management of Designated Wilderness Areas, and will be included within BLM Manual 8560 when updated.

Coordination: This IM was coordinated with the BLM's National Recreation and Visitor Services Group.

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1 Attachment

[1 – Appendix 1 \(1p\)](#)

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Last updated: 12-27-2007