



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

National Park Service

[NPS-WASO-VRP-WS-NPS41952; Docket No. NPS-2026-0101; PPWOVPADW0, PPMRLE1Y.Y00000, 266P103601]

EXPLORE Act Mandated Wilderness Climbing Guidance for National Park Service

AGENCY: National Park Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The National Park Service (NPS) announces the availability of draft guidance governing the management of climbing activities in wilderness areas in the National Park System, as mandated by the EXPLORE Act Section 122 (Protecting America's Rock Climbing). Comments are now being accepted from the public, and local, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies.

DATES: Comments must be received or postmarked on or before 11:59 PM ET on [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: The documents this notice announces are available for public inspection at <https://www.regulations.gov> in Docket No. NPS-2026-0101. Interested persons should submit comments via the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <https://www.regulations.gov>. All comments received will be posted without change to <https://www.regulations.gov>, including any personal information provided.

Instructions: Comments will not be accepted by fax, email, or in any way other than specified. Comments delivered on external electronic storage devices (flash drives, compact discs, etc.) will not be accepted. Bulk comments in any format (hard copy or electronic) submitted on behalf of others will not be accepted.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Michael Michener, Deputy Associate Director, National Park Service, (202) 513-7080.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background.

The National Park Service (NPS) has long recognized that climbing is an important and historically relevant recreational activity in many NPS wilderness areas. Wilderness is a unique resource that has overriding implications for all recreation uses, including climbing. Climbing is among those recreational uses that are traditionally associated with wilderness and identified by Congress in the legislative record for the development of the Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577). As with any human activity, however, climbing will have impacts on wilderness resources and values. Climbing, including climbing in wilderness, continues to grow in popularity, which has prompted both the public and park managers to express the need to establish standard climbing management procedures that recognize the NPS statutory responsibility to preserve wilderness character while also providing appropriate opportunities for recreational climbing in wilderness.

In 2025, the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act was signed into law (Public Law 118-234). EXPLORE Act Section 122, Protecting America's Rock Climbing (PARC), addresses recreational climbing and is codified at 16 U.S.C. § 8422. It contains a requirement for bureau issuance of guidance for recreational climbing activities on covered federal lands, including wilderness.

The NPS requests public comments on the draft revisions of two related documents for wilderness climbing management in the NPS: 1) Director's Order 41: Wilderness Stewardship, Section 7.2 (draft) and 2) Reference Manual 41: Wilderness Stewardship, Section 7.1 (draft). Together, this guidance clarifies NPS policy on managing recreational climbing activities in wilderness in accordance with the Wilderness Act and consistent with the requirements of PARC with respect to the NPS. This request for public comment is entirely separate from the opportunity to provide comments on Director's Order #41: Wilderness Stewardship that also published in today's Federal Register. If you wish to submit comments on the broader policy framework, please comment on that docket.

Michael P. Michener,

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National Park Service.*

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