DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ROCK CLIMBING, RAPPELLING, AND BOULDERING MANAGEMENT POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Background

The Department has long permitted the public to participate in numerous recreational activities on State Forest and State Park land including rock climbing. Traditionally, rock climbing and associated activities have occurred with few guidelines established to assist the Bureau of Forestry or Bureau of State Parks in directing this unique and growing recreational pursuit. Climbers have long used cliffs, rock outcroppings, boulders, and other rock formations for climbing purposes with virtually no restrictions on State Forest land. State Parks have permitted this activity only in those specific locations posted open. In order to preserve the state forests' and state parks' unique geologic formations, historic and cultural resources, to protect sensitive flora and fauna resources and to ensure each Bureau's core policies regarding recreational use is adhered to, the time has arrived to address all of these concerns through the adoption of rock climbing management guidelines. Many national and state forests and parks throughout the United States have developed and implemented climbing management strategies within the last twenty years and, with an expected increase in recreational use on DCNR lands due to the PA Wilds and other recreational initiatives, climbing management guidelines have been established to prevent user conflicts, environmental degradation and to ensure an enjoyable experience for every climbing enthusiast and state forest visitor in general.

DCNR Rock Climbing Policy

State Forest Land

Rock climbing, rappelling, and bouldering is permitted on State Forest land in areas where ecological, environmental, geological, archaeological or historic resources or values will not be impacted to a significant extent.

State Park Land

Areas posted as open to rock climbing, rappelling, and bouldering on State Park land shall not have a significant impact on the ecological, environmental, geological archaeological or historical resources or values of the site.

Dispute Resolution

State Forest Land

Should a conflict with the climbing community occur after an area is proposed to be posted closed to rock climbing, a conflict resolution process will be required. Negotiations will be held at the local forest district level with the affected local club(s) (or, in the absence of a local trail club, the Access Fund). The parties intend to exhaust all practical means of conflict resolution at the local level before resorting to any further appeals process. Failing satisfactory resolution by negotiations at the local forest district level, the Recreation Section shall receive a written justification explaining why the area should be closed. A comprehensive assessment of the area may be required to determine whether rock climbing

may or may not be permitted. If the justification is accepted, the area in question may be closed. If the approval is denied, the area will remain open for climbing.

State Park Land

In the event a particular area is requested to be open to climbing activities, a written justification must be submitted to the Planning Section for review to ultimately approve or disapprove the request. In addition the park manager will follow the "Standards for Appropriate Recreation guidelines" found in the Park Management Plan. A comprehensive assessment of the area may be required to determine whether rock climbing may be permitted at a particular location. An agreement, issued by the Park Operations and Maintenance Division (POMD), is needed for the installation of any permanent climbing fixtures.

Rock climbing on DCNR land shall be managed in a consistent manner according to the following guidelines.

General Rock Climbing Guidelines

- The placement, removal, or replacement of fixed anchors, including bolts, coldshuts, and chains is not permitted without prior approval of the Department. Rivets and pitons are not permitted to be used for rock climbing purposes.
- It may, in certain instances, become necessary to close entire formations or particular climbing routes permanently or on a temporary basis to ensure resource or value concerns are protected. The aforementioned procedures shall be followed. In the event of a closure on State Forest land, the Bureau of Forestry shall post an area (or route) closed to climbing. The Bureau of State Parks will remove any signs indicating an area is open to climbing should issues develop necessitating the reversion to closure. The Regional Coordinator for the Access Fund and any local clubs should be notified. The duration of the closure should also be relayed. The Access Fund is the national advocacy organization that keeps U.S. climbing areas open and conserves the climbing environment. Founded in 1991, the Access Fund supports and represents over 1.6 million climbers nationwide in all forms of climbing; rock climbing, ice climbing, mountaineering, and bouldering. Five core programs support the mission on national and local levels: public policy, stewardship & conservation (including grants), grassroots activism, climber education, and land acquisition.
- Rock alterations by chipping, chiseling, sculpting, drilling, defacing, trundling, or gluing/epoxying of holds (hand & foot) are not permitted without prior approval of the Department. This also includes the practice of dry tooling which involves using ice climbing tools on rock surfaces.
- Climbing and/or rappelling within a known habitat of any rare, threatened or endangered plant or animal species as well in areas determined by the Department to be ecologically significant on DCNR land is not permitted.
- Brushing away or removing vegetation of any type to clear a climbing route is prohibited. Cleaning of individual holds is permitted.
- Climbers are permitted to use and remove temporary anchors without restriction.
- If a tree must be used for climbing purposes, padding must be used to prevent the rope, sling or chain from damaging the tree.
- Climbing is permitted in natural and wild areas, subject to the above restrictions.
- Rappelling, bouldering and ice climbing are permitted on State Forest land in accordance with all local rules, regulations and/or restrictions. Rappelling, bouldering

and ice climbing are permitted on State Park land only in those areas posted open to such uses and in accordance with all local site restrictions.

Climbing Ethics

- Approved, fixed anchors must be of high quality stainless steel, or the equivalent.
- Critical nesting sites are often found in cliff faces for many birds and other animals can use rock outcrops for shelter. Be aware of closures, both mandatory and voluntary, and follow them. Keep alert for animals protecting their home and change or abandon your route to leave them space.
- Remove and carry out all webbing & slings. Leave the area cleaner than you found it.
- Minimize chalk use, use chalk in a mesh bag, use chalk substitutes if available, and brush off heavily chalked holds.
- Climb in small numbers and disperse your activities.
- Remain on climbing routes to avoid fragile ecosystems.
- Even though rock is highly durable, continual climbing can wear it down and break pieces off. Avoid erodable or soft rocks.
- Use quick draws where possible to reduce wear on existing anchors.
- Minimize noise while waiting to climb.
- Climbers should avoid using climbing sites susceptible to erosion and compaction during or after rainfall events to minimize environmental degradation.
- Give other climbing parties plenty of room and time to climb at their pace. Or, politely ask if you can pass when it is convenient and safe.

Definitions

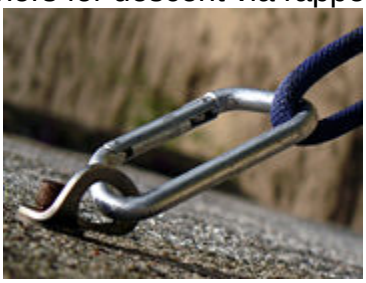
Aid climbing/aid route: refers to a method of recreational climbing performed with the aid of any number and various forms of artificial devices employed by the climber to obtain leverage in order to ascend. “Clean” aid climbing involves the use of removable protection only, but not pitons or other permanent types of protection.

Anchor: any method used to attach oneself to the rock. Common types of anchors are natural, removable, and fixed. This term is generally used to indicate anchors placed at belay locations.

Aspect: a view in a certain direction. The direction that a certain slope faces.

Belaying: The technique of controlling the rope so that a falling climber does not fall very far. While this task is typically assigned to a belayer, self-belaying is also possible as an advanced technical climbing technique. Can also mean the place where the belayer is anchored; this would typically be a ledge.

Bolt: a type of permanent, fixed anchor commonly used for both protection and belay/rappel anchors. To place this fixed protection, a hole is drilled by hammering a hand- turned drill, or by use of a battery charged power drill. The bolt is then inserted and affixed to the rock. The placement of bolts allows climbers to attempt extremely difficult and previously unprotected rock faces, and to place fixed anchors for descent via rappel.



Bouldering: is climbing with no rope or belay at the base of a cliff, at a boulder field, in a climbing gym, or on manmade structures.

Camming Devices: are mechanical devices, typically spring loaded, used for protection from falling. They are designed to expand once placed in a crack and are removed by manually retracting the spring.

Carabiners: are aluminum alloy snap- links used to connect a climber's rope to intermediate protection and anchors.

Chains: metal links sometimes used in place of slings. Chains are left in place at the anchor bolt and are used for climbers to descend from the top of a route.

Chipping: the act of creating, sculpting, or enhancing a hold by using a drill, chisel, or hammer to alter the natural surface of the rock.

Chopping: removing a bolt, or entire route, that is already in place.

Chalk: chalk is used as a friction aid in climbing and enhances the climber's ability to ascend difficult rock climbs. White chalk is widely used and contrasts with the natural color of the rock. Traces of chalk can often be found around the base of rock climbs.

Clean Climbing: is a climbing method that uses no permanent fixed protection to ascend a route. Only removable protection such as nuts and camming devices are used, which are

then removed by the last climber in the party. Clean climbing is considered minimum impact climbing that does little or no harm to the rock.

Cold Shuts (anchor): permanent rings attached to bolts at the top of a climb, with the rings being large enough to accommodate a climbing rope. Cold shuts are used to facilitate descent via rappel, and are used in place of slings or chains. Typically made up of two bolts.

Crack Climbing: refers to climbing using natural fractures in a rock surface. Accomplished by jamming fingers, hands, feet, toes, arms, legs, or entire bodies into a crack. Removable protection is generally used.

Expansion bolts: are 2 to 4 inch long metal rods that are typically threaded on one end and machined on the other end so that the end expands with great force when the rod is either twisted or hammered into a drilled hole ("bolting"). After the bolt is placed in a hole in this fashion, a "hanger" can be secured to the threaded end by use of a nut. Some varieties of bolts have hangers or eyes that are permanently pre- attached. Bolts are considered permanent fixed protection.

Fixed protection: is permanently placed protection left in the rock, typically a bolt or a piton intended to be permanently placed. Fixed protection is usually applied when no "clean" or removable protection is available.

Free climbing: is the sole use of the body and physical power to ascend; rope and equipment are used only as a backup should a climber fall.

Free soloing: ascending a rock face or cliff with no rope, belayer, or intermediate protection.

Hanger: is an L- shaped piece of metal that is attached to a bolt with a threaded nut and bears an eye or hole capable of accommodating a carabiner. A hanger attached to a placed bolt is usually considered to be as permanent as a bolt.

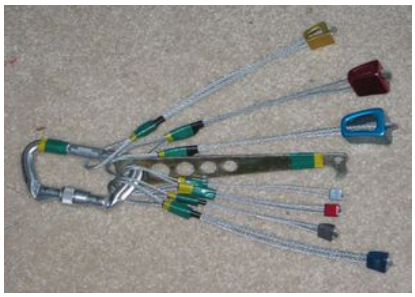
Hardware: climbing equipment placed in cracks or on faces to protect climbers from falling including chock, nuts, friends, pitons, and bolts.

Holds: are ledges, cracks, depressions, or protrusions on the rock surface that are used to support a climber's weight when grasped by a hand or stepped onto by a foot.

Mixed route: refers to a climbing route where there is a mixture of natural, clean, and fixed protection.

Natural protection: Protection offered by the natural attributes of the rock, chockstones, trees, or bushes.

Nut: A metal wedge threaded on a wire, used for protection by wedging it into a crack in a rock.



Pitch: The distance a lead climber ascends before he or she stops to belay the second climber's ascent. The distance of a pitch is limited by the length of rope used by climbers and the location of ledges and anchor stations.

Piton: a type of semi- permanent, fixed protection. Pitons are placed by hammering metal “spikes” into already existing cracks in the rock. They are not commonly used, though there are still some in place.

Power drill: battery- operated tool used by climbers to drill holes into rock for the installation of bolts. Power drills can bore a hole into rock in less than a minute. Hand drills are manually operated, metal drill bits driven into the rock when stuck repeatedly with a hammer. A bolt installed with a hand drill can take up to 30 minutes to place.

Protection: any form of intermediate anchor used to protect a climber. It can be natural, removable, or fixed.

Quick Draws: Consists of two carabiners connected by a sewn loop of webbing. The webbing is usually 5” to 12” in length. Used to connect the climbing rope to bolt anchors or other protection.

Rappel: is the method by which a climber descends a rope, usually by using a mechanical device that allows a controlled descent with little effort. Ropes are generally doubled or tied together and retrieved by pulling all the way through on one end after the rappel is finished.

Rating (standard of difficulty): is a numerical index used to indicate the difficulty of free climbing a particular route. The rating or standard is set by the first ascensionist then revised by subsequent parties, if necessary. The index ranges from 5.0 to a current maximum of 5.14. The “5" indicates that the type of climbing is technical free climbing. Whereas virtually any able- bodied person can climb 5.0 with little practice, only Olympic-caliber trained athletes can climb 5.14.

Retro-bolting: is the practice of bolting an existing route after the first ascent to make it safer or more convenient to lead.

Rivet: A short metal stud which is tapped into a drilled hole and connected to a short sling or hanger. Used as protection on aid routes and holds the body weight of a climber, even in very shallow holes.

Rock alteration: involves the physical modification of the rock surface and may include filing off rough edges, reinforcing loose hand and foot holds with epoxy glue, removing loose rocks, or creating new holds with hammers, chisels, or drills.

Rock climbing is a sport in which participants climb up or across natural rock formations or man-made rock walls with the goal of reaching the summit of a formation or the endpoint of a pre-defined route. Rock climbing is similar to scrambling (another activity involving the scaling of hills and similar formations), but climbing is generally differentiated by its need for the use of the climber's hands to hold his or her own weight and not just provide balance.

Rock climbing is a physically and mentally demanding sport, one that often tests a climber's strength, endurance, agility, and balance along with his or her mental control. It can be a dangerous sport and knowledge of proper climbing techniques and use of specialized climbing equipment is crucial for the safe completion of routes.

Route cleaning: the removal of soils and vegetation from new and existing climbing routes, including wire brushing lichens from the rock face. Loose rocks are also removed for safety reasons. Effects of route cleaning are greatest with new route development.

Slings: are knotted or sewn loops of nylon webbing that are occasionally left behind when a climber descends from the top of a route, typically by rappelling or being lowered off by the belayer. Sometimes metal chains or coldshuts are used for the same purpose rather than slings because they are easier to use once in place, last longer, and may be less conspicuous than webbing.

Software: refers to slings, webbing, and rope that attaches to climbing hardware.

Sport climbing: is a style of climbing typically involving short (less than a rope length) routes with fixed bolt protection. Previewing and practicing a climb is common and the emphasis is on technical difficulty. Sport climbs tend to involve less physical risk (due to the regular spacing of bolted protection points) and rarely continue to summits. Sport climbing routes generally end at top fixed anchors where the sustained difficulty of the climb diminishes or the character of the rock changes.

Top rope: a method of protection in which climbers place a rope on a fixed anchor point at the top of the cliff to use for belaying a climbing partner. Belaying can be done at the top or bottom of the cliff.

Traditional Climbing: is a style of climbing where the climber uses only natural or removable protection. Crack climbing is one example of traditional climbing.

Trundling: The practice of rolling large rocks or boulders down hillsides.