



Winter at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, as seen from Pulpit Rock. (National Park Service)



Rock climbers at Colorado National Monument. (Thomas C. Gray/NPS/Public domain)

# Bill would regulate rock-climbing on federal lands

By ASHLEY MURRAY  
COLORADO NEWSLINE

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan bill that would establish standards for recreational rock climbing on federal lands is one step closer to becoming law.

The Protecting America’s Rock Climbing Act was approved by the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources in late June, giving a boost to the millions of climbing advocates working to safeguard the thriving sport and the access to some of the country’s most impressive crags.

The bill, if passed by Congress, would require the U.S. secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to set standards for recreational rock climbing activities in federally designated wilderness lands.

“Allowable activities” outlined in the bill include the placement, use and maintenance of fixed anchors and other equipment that climbers use to affix the ropes that tie into their harnesses.

The committee approved the bill in a 21-15 vote. Reps. John Curtis, a Utah Republican, and

Joe Neguse, a Colorado Democrat, introduced the proposal in March.

“Colorado’s natural areas are home to some world-renowned rock climbing locations. By requiring additional agency guidance on climbing management, we are taking steps to protect our climbers and the spaces in which they recreate,” Neguse said in a press release upon the bill’s introduction.

In his statement, Curtis underscored outdoor recreation as an “ever-growing industry” in his state.

“Ensuring access to these lands is vital not just for our economy, but also to ensure the millions of Americans who enjoy rock climbing can fully explore our nation’s national treasures,” he said.

The Outdoor Industry Association — a coalition of companies whose policy platforms range from climate to international trade — estimated in its inaugural “State of Climbing” report that the sport of climbing contributed \$12.4 billion to the U.S. economy in 2017. The report also credits climbers for creating a “significant

economic impact” to communities near rural climbing destinations, including Lee County, Kentucky, and Sandrock, Alabama.

**Climbers and the Park Service**

At issue is the lack of standard rules across federal agencies that manage U.S. wilderness and parks, said Erik Murdock, interim executive director of the Access Fund, a national rock climbing advocacy organization that represents roughly 8 million climbers and advocates for pro-climber laws and access.

“This bill is really important in order to provide clarity and to push back on some of the recent actions by the National Park Service to prohibit climbing,” Murdock said. He highlighted an NPS proposal that considered banning fixed anchors on the 2,200-foot walls of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park — a sought-after climbing destination in Colorado.

In response to a request for comment, the NPS pointed States Newsroom to its testimony against the bill, citing concerns

that the legislation could impose “significant administrative burdens” and would have the “practical effect of amending the Wilderness Act, which is not only unnecessary but could potentially have deleterious consequences.”

“The Department feels it has sufficient authorities under the Wilderness Act to fully support recreational climbing opportunities in designated wilderness opportunities in a manner that balances tribal, recreational, environmental, and wilderness preservation values and interests and therefore does not believe legislation is necessary,” said Michael T. Reynolds, NPS deputy director of congressional and external relations, in his statement to Congress.

Some park managers and wilderness advocates have long argued against the bolting of anchors to natural rock areas. The NPS wrote in its August 2022 draft plan for the Black Canyon area that anchors and other structures could “diminish” the natural landscape and threaten the “solitude” of the remote areas. The plan detailed an

application and selection process for the installation of any new fixed anchors.

But the climbing community credits itself for major wins in land conservation across the U.S. According to Access Fund figures, the organization has purchased and conserved 90 climbing areas and just last year raised \$3.6 billion for public lands conservation.

“What this particular (legislation) is doing is essentially codifying what climbers have been doing for decades in wilderness areas across the country, which is working in partnership with landowners to responsibly place fixed anchors to protect climber safety, to ensure sustainable climbing access, and essentially, to ensure access to these climbing routes that have historical significance for the climbing community,” said Ginette Walker Vinski, board president of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Climbers Coalition.

**Prospects in the Senate**

An amendment proposed to the Senate’s

America’s Outdoor Recreation Act recognizes that fixed anchors used for climbing are “appropriate” in wilderness areas, and extends that standard across lands managed by the USDA’s Forest Service as well as agencies within Interior.

The amendment, by Democratic Sen. John Hickenlooper of Colorado, received unanimous support in the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources in May.

“Outdoor recreation is enormously important to Colorado — for our communities, our economies, and our way of life,” Hickenlooper said just after the vote. “Rock climbing is a vital part of our outdoor recreation tradition and our economy.”

The Outdoor Recreation Act, a vehicle for several outdoor recreation proposals that was originally sponsored by committee Chair and West Virginia Democrat Sen. Joe Manchin III, has yet to reach the Senate floor. The committee’s ranking member Sen. John Barasso, a Wyoming Republican, is the co-sponsor.

# Exercise caution during monsoon season



**Tips from the Posse**  
By Mark Rackay

I was fishing a stretch of the Pine River in southern Colorado one summer afternoon. There was a very ominous thunderstorm building upstream of me. It appeared the storm was directly over the canyon area of the river. I was about 15 miles below the canyon where the river flow was much slower as it wound its way through the miles of hayfields.

The hayfields belonged to a rancher buddy of mine that let me come and fish occasionally. I had to bring him several nice-sized brown trout for his dinner as a trespass fee.

The fields were home to the rancher’s 1,500, or



The monsoon season can bring torrential rainfall in a short time with thunderstorms, and anyone outdoors should be prepared. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

thereabouts, head of cattle. Because of the severity of the upstream storm, I opted to hike straight across the fields back to my truck, rather than take chances of a flash flood washing me away to who knows where.

I was moving at a good clip to stay ahead of the upcoming lightning, and at the same time, safely navigate the minefield left by the rancher’s cattle.

Cattle think the world is just one big toilet and they

walk around indiscriminately making deposits, just to show us what they think. It was either the pasture patties or the storm, and I chose the patties.

Welcome to monsoon season in Colorado.

Late summer is the hottest time to be in the high desert regions of the Southwest United States. It is also the monsoon season, when afternoon thunderstorms are likely. Anyone who recreates

outdoors during this time of year should have an understanding of the season and the potential hazards, before heading out.





Easy to care for allium can make a dramatic Fourth of July plant. Once they finish blooming, they form a gorgeous seed head that you can cut and spray paint red, white or blue for a great Independence Day decoration. (Photo by author)

# Independence Day in the garden

Summer gardens are in full swing, and Independence Day celebrations seem to be getting a lot of us out into our yards and gardens. If you want your landscape to look its best, here are some thoughts for your Fourth of July gardens.

As the summer heats up, flower blossoms can begin to look a little hot, tired, and fade away. Deadheading, or cutting off the faded flowers will help keep annual flowers and some perennials blooming and looking fresh. Your flower boxes and hanging baskets could probably use a little fertilizing about this time of year. A balanced plant food, such as a 10-10-10 stated on the package, will help them to look great and keep them blooming.

If your lawn is looking a little peaked and not growing quite as quickly as you wish it would, you could apply a light application of nitrogen and iron to it. Don't overdo it though. You should only apply about 1 pound of nitrogen to 1,000 square feet of lawn. Too much nitrogen at this time of year can encourage insect and disease problems.

If you have a blue grama or buffalo grass lawn this is the time to fertilize it. One half pound of nitrogen to 1,000 square feet is recommended. As always, follow



## Gardening From A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

the instructions on the bag when applying it. There are so many interesting insects in the garden right now and because it's such a bug eat bug world it's always a good idea to identify any insect before you grab a spray. You may be killing off some of the good guys without even knowing it if you go too crazy. It's important to know what insects you're dealing with because controls are different for different insects. Some bugs feed by sucking and some by chewing. If you spray an insect that feeds by sucking with a pesticide designed to control insects that feed by chewing you'll kill the predator insects and your intended target bugs will still be alive, healthy, and keep right on reproducing. Sometimes insects are here today and almost gone

tomorrow so knowing which insects to be concerned about and which ones are causing no real harm is a good idea. You may want to put the offending pest in a Ziploc plastic bag and bring it to the CSU Extension office for an ID. I know some people are having problems with grubs in their lawn. If you suspect grubs are causing some issues here's a good way to check for them. If you can grab the turf with both hands and lift it up like a piece of carpet it most likely has grubs that chewed off the roots. You could also put a few drops of liquid dish soap in a bucket of water and pour it over the area where you suspect grubs. This should bring them to the surface if grubs are the problem. Sometimes you can pick the grubs up and dispose of them. However, if you find more than four or five per square foot, you should treat the infested area with a product labeled for grub control. Water issues are usually the cause of most lawn problems. Remember, deep infrequent watering is the key to a healthy lawn! About a half hour of watering two to three times a week is recommended for most bluegrass lawns. If some areas look brown while

other areas are green, a malfunctioning irrigation head could be causing the problem. To switch topics a bit, I just have to tell you about scapes. I hope you're growing garlic in your garden and know about the scapes. Some of us think that's the best part of growing garlic. Just in case you don't know what I'm talking about, scapes are the top portion of the garlic plant. As the plant matures some of the tops may grow in a curl which is the scape. These will only form on what's called hardneck varieties. You'll know the scapes are ready to use when they form a half or full loop and form a pointed seed pod at the tip, which many are doing this time of year. If you wait too long to harvest them they will get tough and actually straighten out and form a flower or bulb. This is not good eats and the garlic bulb won't keep well when this happens. If you're lucky and have scapes, cut the scape off right at the base where it meets the top set of leaves. Don't pull up the garlic just yet. It will probably be about another month before the bulbs will be ready to harvest. (When the tops of your garlic are beginning to fall over, it may be time to har-

vest the bulbs. Look for two dead, dry leaves at the base of the plant, with a third leaf that is starting to die.) If you really want to impress your fourth of July company you might want to cook up something using the mild flavored scapes. Scape butter, garlic scape hummus, garlic scape pesto — oh, I need to stop. I'm making myself hungry and I want to go the garden and cut some. There are so many great scape recipes online if this sound good to you too. They can be wrapped in a damp paper towel or put in a loose plastic bag and kept in the refrigerator for two or three weeks if you want to save some for later enjoyment. If you're wishing you would have planted garlic this year it's too late to do so now. Fall is the ideal time to plant it for next year's garden. And speaking of fall, have you ever associated Allium bulbs with the fourth of July? Allium, sometimes referred to as ornamental onion are great plants! I know, onions aren't usually considered a gorgeous garden plant but these close cousins definitely deserve a place in your landscape. The incredible pom-pom shaped purple, white, or lavender flower heads are composed of dozens of star-shaped flowers. They can

grow to a height of about a foot to 4 feet tall. The flower itself can be about softball size to ten inches across, getting a little larger every year. These are really easy bulbs to grow. You just plant the bulb in the fall and almost walk away for years of enjoyment. Rabbits, deer, or rodents won't even bother them but butterflies and bees love them! They'll look fantastic as an accent growing among your other early season perennials. Once they finish blooming they form a gorgeous seed head. You can cut these off and spray paint them red, white or blue for a really cool fourth of July decoration. You might even try a little glitter spray paint for some sparkle and all of a sudden they look like fireworks in an arrangement. You should definitely plant some this fall if you haven't added them to your garden yet. I'm thinking about Independence Day in my very own garden. What could be more American? Growing what you want on your own land and simply enjoying it. Now that's something to celebrate! I hope you have a safe and happy holiday! Linda Corwine McIntosh is an ISA certified arborist, commercial pesticide applicator and Colorado advanced master gardener.

## MONSOON

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The North American Monsoon, or NAM, is a shift in the wind pattern that allows for continuous moisture to flow from the Gulf of California into the normally arid Southwest region of the country. This usually happens when a strategically centered high pressure, flowing clockwise, and a low pressure, flowing counterclockwise, settle in over the region. For Colorado, the NAM typically starts in July and runs through July and sometimes into September. You may notice an occasional wet day here and there, and some dry days in between, before it really settles into a pattern. Keep an eye on the dewpoints as an indicator. Normally they run in the 30s or lower, but when the NAM arrives, you will see dew

points in the 50s. A typical monsoon pattern will show the greatest precipitation extending from Arizona and New Mexico, past the four corners region, and into Colorado. On a strong NAM year, and depending where the high and low end up, the entire state can be affected. A La Niña summer in Colorado typically leads to above average temperatures for our state. According to research, a strong La Niña correlates with a stronger monsoon season. The moisture flows into Colorado via southerly winds. It makes afternoon rain and thunderstorms more likely, especially over the mountains and high country. Lightning is more likely during monsoon season along with brief heavy rain that could result in flash flooding. During peak moisture surges,

overnight and morning rain are also possible. Thunderstorms with heavy rain can cause severe flooding in canyons. These storms can be sudden and very powerful. Water can rise quickly downstream from the heavy rain, even when the thunderstorm is miles away. If you are visiting the area during monsoon season: Know the weather forecast for your area as well as areas upstream. Finish hiking in the morning and be out of canyons or away from washes before the afternoon. Do not camp overnight or park your vehicle along or near streams and washes. If you are hiking in canyons or by water: Pay attention to water conditions. Leave the river area immediately if the water becomes muddy or begins rising! Stay out of flooded areas, as the water

may still be rising, and the current is swift. Flash flooding can happen at any low water crossing or dip, and on roadways. Never drive your vehicle into a flooded roadway. Either find another way or wait patiently for the flooding to stop. We have all seen the vehicles washed away by storms on the evening news, don't be that guy. These storms will also bring lightning as an added attraction. A lightning strike can leave you deadlier than easy credit. In Colorado alone, a dozen people are struck annually, and some of them killed outright. When lightning is around, seek appropriate shelter, like a building with walls, roof, and a floor. A hard-topped vehicle with all the doors and windows completely closed will do. If you get caught in the

open by lightning, and no shelter is available: If in a group, spread out at least 50 feet apart to minimize the chance of everyone being struck. Adopt the lightning position — crouch down on the balls of your feet, keeping them as close together as possible. Don't allow other body parts to touch the ground and cover your ears! The bottom line is to be aware of the changing conditions while you are out. Get a weather forecast the morning of your trip and pay attention to any weather changes. If you are hiking in canyons or near streams/rivers, be alert to water conditions. Leave the area immediately if the water becomes muddy or begins rising! Stay out of flooded areas — water may still be rising and the current is swift. If you hear a clap of

thunder, seek immediate shelter. Do not go back outside for at least 30 minutes after hearing the last thunderclap. Summer is the best time to enjoy the great outdoors. Just be aware of your surroundings constantly. Thinking about cows, maybe they do have the right idea about the world. Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.