


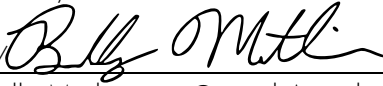
CLIMBING MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR
BREAKS INTERSTATE PARK

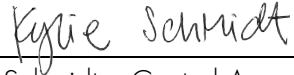
Prepared in cooperation with the Access Fund, Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition, Breaks Interstate Park


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Introduction

Climbing Management Plans (CMP) are an effective way for land managers to formally and proactively manage climbing on both public and private lands. A successful CMP:

- Builds cooperative relationships between climbers and resource managers.
- Articulates climbing as a recreational experience and describes the variety of climbing opportunities as values.
- Identifies management alternatives that address climbing impacts in a manner that is consistent with management approaches used with other recreation groups.
- Provides management direction that is the minimum necessary to protect resources and is implemented on a graduated scale from indirect measures (e.g. education) to direct measures (e.g. restrictions).
- Provides information about status and contextual importance of resource values, climbing activity and provides information about contextual use patterns, and effects of climbing activity on identified resource values.
- Satisfies statutory requirements and internal agency guidance (where applicable).
- Compliments land management agency policy and directives.

Disclosure

Climbing is a high-risk sport, and climbers are solely responsible for their own safety. Climbing involves exposure to hazardous terrain and conditions. Breaks Interstate Park is not obligated to assess or mitigate these hazards, nor is it responsible for assessing or maintaining the safety of climbing resources which include, but are not limited to: approach paths, trails, climbing routes, fixed anchors or fixed equipment.

Background and Area

Breaks Interstate Park (BIP) is a bi-state park located in the Cumberland Mountains of Virginia and Kentucky. BIP spans three counties: Pike County in Kentucky, and Buchanan and Dickenson Counties in Virginia. Covering 4,500 acres of rugged and scenic terrain, the park's dominant feature is the deep river gorge of Russell Fork River, designated in Virginia as Russell Fork State Scenic River, and a river trail of Kentucky's Blue Water Trails system.

The Breaks climbing area is located entirely within BIP. It is regionally known as a major, high quality sandstone climbing area in a spectacular setting, with convenient lodging and camping amenities. Known climbing history dates to at least the 1990s, and probably earlier due to overlap between whitewater paddling and rock climbing groups and activity. Climbing areas in Breaks consist of many individual sub-sections of cliff line. Historic climbing routes are located on cliffs along the Overlook Trail, River Trail, Loop Trail, Towers Trail, and Russell Fork River Access. Additional climbing areas may

exist throughout BIP along the trails described above; along the Geological and Prospector Trails; on The Towers and Chimney Rock; near Potter's Flats, and at various points on the south side of the river from Garden Hole, to Camp Branch Trail, to Mill Rock Point. See [Mountain Project](#) for permitted climbing areas.

Goals of Climbing Management Plan

For the purpose of this plan, the area of consideration includes all of BIP. This plan applies to BIP lands only. Updates to the CMP may occur by mutual agreement of the Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition (CACC), Access Fund (AF) and BIP; or at the discretion of the BIP, if necessary for resource protection.

1. Manage for climbing activities while protecting the natural and cultural resources of BIP.
2. Clearly define a set of management objectives for climbing within the BIP area that will allow for continued climbing related activities.
3. Establish management guidelines and best practices that land managers can use in the education of climbers visiting BIP, and in decision making.
4. Enable a productive and efficient working relationship between land managers and the climbing community to address emerging issues and adaptively manage the area in a cooperative manner.

Topics covered in Climbing Management Plan

1. Climbing
2. Approach Trails and Staging Areas
3. Vegetation Alteration
4. Rock Alteration
5. Fixed Gear
6. Gear Caches
7. Bouldering
8. Human and Pet Waste
9. Social and Recreational Impacts
10. Cultural and Paleontological Resources
11. Wildlife and Rare Plant Resources

12. Search and Rescue Considerations

13. Partnerships

1. Climbing

- A. Climbing areas in Breaks consist of many individual sub-sections, or sectors, of cliff line. Climbing is allowed in approved sectors of BIP. See [Mountain Project](#) for permitted climbing areas.
- B. All climbers seeking to climb at BIP are required to fill out and sign the park climbing permit and waiver, which will be available at the Visitor Center, Lodging Registration Area, and online: <https://waiver.fr/p-ujXvT>. See Appendix A for Climbing Regulations.
- C. Requests for approval of new climbing areas in BIP are welcome and will be considered. BIP will review these submissions and respond monthly. Consideration and approval of new climbing sectors may occur by mutual agreement of BIP, CACC and/or Access Fund; or at the discretion of the BIP, if necessary for resource protection. Requests should be submitted via email to info@breakspark.com.

2. Approach Trails and Staging Areas

- A. Existing approach trails and staging areas should be used when possible.
 - I. Climbers often bushwhack and scramble to gain access to the base of climbing routes. Numerous steep approach trails can result. These user created trails are sometimes braided with other paths to the same climb. Because they sometimes travel straight up the grade, water can be easily diverted onto these trails, causing loss of vegetation and soils. At the base of climbs (e.g. staging areas) in high use areas, the ground may become compacted and denuded of vegetation. Social trails often contour along the base of the rock formation to the start of other climbs. Established access trails will be marked with silver blazes.
 - II. Climbers should limit impacts to vegetation and soils by using existing approach trails and avoiding creation of new approach corridors.
 - III. As conditions warrant, climbers and land management agency staff may identify specific improvement projects to address safety and environmental concerns along approach corridors and at staging areas. Improvements may require environmental analysis including biological and cultural clearances.
- B. The intentional development of approach trails is prohibited except as follows:
 - I. Construction (e.g. improvements, structures, tool work) of new approach trails is not allowed under land management regulations without prior approval by the proper land management agency.

- II. New approach trails may only be constructed after; identification, assessment, design, and environmental analysis are completed through the proper land management agency approval process.
- III. Improvement of existing approach/descent trails and staging areas:
 - a. After prior agency approval, access trails and staging areas of well-known and more heavily used climbing routes may be identified, delineated, hardened and maintained in order to prevent further erosion problems, loss of vegetation, and to establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use. In certain instances, signs may be placed to direct climbers away from problem or sensitive areas in order to protect resources. Extraneous user created paths that have developed over long periods of time, or currently see infrequent use, may be rehabilitated to discourage or prevent future travel. Travel in higher use areas should be on established access trails and corridors.
 - b. Dispersed travel to and from the base of climbs, and during descent, is generally encouraged in lower use climbing areas where established access trails do not exist.

3. Vegetation Alteration

- A. Removal of vegetation from the base of climbs, belay ledges, or bouldering areas is discouraged.
- B. It is understood that some limited loss of vegetation is likely to occur at established climbing areas. Where necessary, vegetation removal should establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use.
- C. The removal of vegetation from cracks or rock faces to allow a route to become more climbable is discouraged.
- D. Using trees for natural anchors is discouraged. If using trees as natural anchors, care should be taken to prevent damage to the tree.

4. Rock Alteration

- A. The removal of rock from its natural position will be allowed only when the rock to be removed poses a significant risk to the climbing party or a future climbing party.
- B. Chipping, gluing, or attaching artificial holds is prohibited.

5. Fixed Gear

A. Fixed Hardware

- I. The use of non-climbing specific hardware (e.g. concrete anchors, home manufactured equipment, cables, etc.) is discouraged.
- II. Modern, commercially available climbing specific hangers and bolts of a length adequate for the rock conditions, and of a highly corrosion resistant metal such as stainless steel are required.
- III. The use of reflective hardware is discouraged, especially in areas where conflict with other user groups is most likely to occur such as near multi-use trails, developed sites or viewpoints.
- IV. Camouflaging fixed anchors to match natural rock color is encouraged.
- V. When replacing unsafe fixed anchors, use of modern, commercially available hardware of a highly corrosion resistant metal such as stainless steel is required. A reasonable effort to remove the existing, unsafe hardware will be made and existing drill holes will be used in the installation of replacement fixed anchors whenever possible.
- VI. The installation and removal of pitons does permanent damage to the rock and is strongly discouraged. Pitons should only be used when any other reasonably safe means of protecting the climbing party is non-existent.
- VII. The use of permanent quick draws (e.g., permadraws) is discouraged, but may be allowed on a case-by-case basis with consideration by CACC and BIP.

B. Fixed Software

- I. The placement of fixed rope for the purpose of retreating from a climb, working a new project or establishing a new climbing route may be allowed under the following conditions: (1) the climbing party intends to return to continue the climb, and (2) the placement does not exceed a period of 7 days.
- II. Fixed software (e.g. rope, webbing, slings, cord, etc. left for the purpose of retreating from a climb) should be of a natural color similar to the surrounding rock.

6. New Routes

A. The establishment of new climbing routes is allowed according to all the policies described herein and summarized in Appendix C. Climbers establishing new routes must also follow the following procedure:

I. New routes must be posted on mountainproject.com within one week of developing, regardless of completion status.

II. To protect sensitive and rare cliff-top and cliff-edge plants and vegetation, topping out new routes is prohibited. All new routes should have a fixed descent anchor below the cliff-top and cliff-edge to ensure minimal impact to vegetation, and to facilitate climber descent.

B. BIP Funded Hardware.

I. When able, the BIP may purchase and provide hardware for the use of new route development.

II. In order to use this hardware, all new route developers must follow all procedures for route development found in Appendix C, as well as fill out a hardware application form: <https://climbcentralapp.typeform.com/to/qKRheW>. Applications will be reviewed within a month and, when accepted, developer access will be granted for one year before renewal must be sought.

III. Hardware must be signed out at the BIP main office and all unused hardware must be returned by the end of a developers stay.

7. Gear Caches

A. Generally, the caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb is not allowed.

B. Caching of climbing equipment at bouldering areas, including crash pads, is not allowed.

C. The caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb in the event of a retreat due to weather, injury, or illness is allowed for a period not to exceed 7 days.

8. Bouldering

A. Alterations (e.g. movement of rock or woody debris) to pad placements, or surrounding areas, is discouraged.

B. It is understood that some limited loss of vegetation is likely to occur at established climbing areas. Where necessary, alterations should consider durability, sustainability, visual impacts, safety and social impacts.

C. Dragging pads damages vegetation and soils, and is strongly discouraged.

9. Human and Pet Waste

- A. Climbers should abide by standard Leave No Trace practices for rock climbing.
- B. Climbers should clean up after themselves and pack out all trash and garbage.
- C. Packing out human and pet waste is encouraged, especially in areas with moderate to high levels of use, and where appropriate means of disposal (e.g., catholes, privies) are not available or appropriate.
- D. Availability and placement of toilets should be considered in areas of higher use.

10. Social and Recreational Impacts

- A. Climbers frequently utilize voice signals to communicate specific needs during a climb to facilitate safe ascent or descent. Such noise can disrupt wildlife or impact hikers adjacent to climbing areas. Other noises (e.g. rock hammers, drills) may also be considered intrusive in some settings. Climbers are encouraged to be sensitive to the value of natural quiet. Rock hammers or drills should be used judiciously during sensitive times for wildlife (e.g. breeding, nesting, fledging) and in areas where other visitors may be disturbed.
- B. Climbers are encouraged to be sensitive to the value of the visual resource. The visual impacts of fixed anchors can be managed by camouflaging equipment. The visual impacts of chalk use can be managed through educating climbers on reducing the use of chalk, cleaning after themselves, and encouraging chalk clean-up projects.
- C. Levels of use should be monitored. Management action including capacity limitations (e.g. allowable route densities, new fixed anchor authorizations, commercial use, group use, etc.) may be utilized if user conflict or crowding occurs, or if there is unacceptable change to resource (e.g. physical, biological, social, managerial) conditions.
- D. The climbing community and land managers will work together to mitigate user conflicts.

11. Cultural Resources

- A. Climbing or new route development may be restricted to protect cultural resources.
- B. Leave any cultural resource discoveries intact and in place.
- C. Immediately notify BIP by telephone of the discovery of any culturally significant objects including antiquities or other objects of historic or scientific interest, including but not limited to historic or prehistoric ruins, fossils, or artifacts.

12. Wildlife and Rare Plant Resources

A. Climbing or new route development may be restricted to protect federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive wildlife and rare plant species. Climbing on heavily vegetated cliffs is prohibited. BIP contains two distinct types of cliff communities, one of which is marked by low levels of vegetative cover (10% or less) and another which is marked by heavy vegetation. Heavily vegetated cliff supports a natural community known to contain rare and sensitive species.

Impacts from climbing activities should be monitored and assessed regularly to ascertain needed management adaption or necessary improvements.

BIP welcomes input from climbers about observations of any wildlife or rare plants at climbing areas to enhance local understanding of the ecology of cliff communities.

B. Temporary closures may be used to protect nesting raptors during critical phases of the courtship, nesting, and fledging periods. Closures will begin in early spring. Raptor activity should be monitored and those areas or routes with current raptor use may be closed. Other areas where activity is discovered may also be closed. Closures will be in effect long enough to ensure protection and non-disturbance of the birds.

Raptor closure time period and spatial extent may vary depending on the species, nest site, topography and other conditions.

C. Closures may also be utilized for other wildlife and rare plant protection as necessary.

D. Restrictions and closures will be posted at the BIP office, and as possible, online, and on the ground near logical access points.

13. Search and Rescue Considerations

A. As climbing management activities continue to increase, the climbing community will work alongside BIP and local rescue personnel to identify key points of access and to identify, with common terminology, key rock features and climbing areas.

B. BIP staff and climbers will work together to complete a map to provide SAR operators.

C. Prompt posting of new routes on mountainproject.com will assist with the process of locating injured climbers in the event of an accident.

14. Partnerships

A. BIP and the climbing community identify the need for collaboration and partnerships.

I. The Breaks Interstate Park office (276-865-4413, info@breakspark.com) will be the main point of contact for BIP.

II. The Access Fund (303.545.6772) and CACC (climbcentralappalachia@gmail.com) will be the main points of contact for the climbing community.

It may be beneficial for a written agreement (e.g. MOU) between these partners to be established in order to formalize a general cooperative relationship between the parties, to define common interests and goals, and to maintain communication lines.

B. Goals of partnerships.

I. Improve education of climbing community through engagement in public outreach including use of educational events, social media, articles, etc. An education plan for user direction may be developed.

II. Develop an inventory, description, and maps of existing climbing in BIP area including; significant crags/sub-areas, parking situation, approach paths, existing conditions and areas of concern, area emphasis (e.g. trad, sport, mixed, bouldering, ice, alpine), and estimated levels of use (e.g. low, moderate, high) by sub-area.

III. Additionally support local climbing organizations in order to promote and support stewardship efforts and events. These events may include activities such as litter clean-ups, visual impact mitigation, approach trail and staging area maintenance, construction, and restoration, erosion control and closure of social trails, and wildlife and rare plant monitoring.

IV. Consider formation of a fixed hardware review committee to address concerns about bolting in the area. Consider requiring all new fixed anchors to be reviewed and approved by the committee.

APPENDIX A: ROCK CLIMBING REGULATIONS

1. Climbing is by permit only, and all climbers must complete a waiver, both of which can be completed electronically by completing the fields below or by visiting the Breaks Interstate Park Visitor Center or the Lodging Registration Area. The permit and waiver must be completed every calendar year, regardless of previous permit/waiver completion date, and verification of completion must be available (digital or hard copy) while climbing at the Breaks.
2. Climbing on moist, heavily vegetated cliff is prohibited, as these cliffs support a natural community that is known to harbor sensitive and endangered species. Climbing is restricted to dry, sparsely vegetated cliff.
3. No "topping out."
4. Stay on designated trails.
5. Removal of vegetation from the base of climbs, belay ledges, or bouldering areas is prohibited unless approved by park staff.
6. Using trees for natural anchors is discouraged. If using trees as natural anchors, care should be taken to prevent damage to the tree.
7. The removal of rock from its natural position will be allowed only when the rock to be removed poses a significant risk to the climbing party or a future climbing party.
8. Chipping, gluing, or attaching artificial holds is prohibited.
9. Caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb is not allowed.
10. Be mindful of noise level so as not to disturb other park users and wildlife.
11. Be aware of potential seasonal cliff closures due to natural resource concerns, such as nesting peregrine falcons (see information below).
12. Climbers should abide by standard Leave No Trace practices for rock climbing: 1) Climbers should clean up after themselves and pack out all trash and garbage; 2) Packing out human and pet waste is encouraged, especially in areas with moderate to high levels of use, and where appropriate means of disposal (e.g., catholes, privies) are not available or appropriate.
13. The climbing routes found within the gorge are maintained by volunteers and volunteer local climbing organizations. Climbing is inherently dangerous, and it is ultimately the responsibility of each individual climber to inspect all fixed hardware for soundness before using it. Any Fixed anchors and bolts in need of maintenance or replacement should be reported to the Breaks Interstate Park section of www.badbolts.com

14. Climbing is open in the park from 30 minutes prior to sunrise to 30 minutes after sunset. Climbing is not allowed in low light conditions outside of these hours.

15. Free-soloing is prohibited.

APPENDIX B: DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

A. ESTABLISHING NEW CLIMBING AREAS

- i. Requests for approval of new climbing areas in BIP are welcome and will be considered. BIP will review these submissions and respond monthly. Consideration and approval of new climbing sectors may occur by mutual agreement of BIP, CACC and/or Access Fund; or at the discretion of the BIP, if necessary for resource protection. Requests should be submitted via email to info@breakspark.com.
- ii. Development on heavily vegetated cliffs is prohibited.
- iii. Construction (e.g. improvements, structures, tool work) of new approach trails is not allowed under land management regulations without prior approval by the proper land management agency.
- iv. New approach trails may only be constructed after; identification, assessment, design, and environmental analysis are completed through the proper land management agency approval process.
- v. Removal of vegetation from the base of climbs, belay ledges, or bouldering areas is discouraged.

B. ESTABLISHING/REPLACING ROUTES

- i. Development on heavily vegetated cliffs is prohibited.
- ii. New routes must be posted on mountainproject.com within one week of developing, regardless of completion status.
- iii. To protect sensitive and rare cliff-top and cliff-edge plants and vegetation, topping out new routes is prohibited. All new routes should have a fixed descent anchor below the cliff-top and cliff-edge to ensure minimal impact to vegetation, and to facilitate climber descent.
- iv. In order to use hardware provided by the BIP, all new route developers must follow all procedures herein, as well as fill out a hardware application form: <https://climbcentralapp.typeform.com/to/qKRheWV>. Applications will be reviewed within a month and, when accepted, developer access will be granted for one year before renewal must be sought.
- v. The use of non-climbing specific hardware (e.g. concrete anchors, home manufactured equipment, cables, etc.) is discouraged.
- vi. Modern, commercially available climbing specific hangers and bolts of a length adequate for the rock conditions, and of a highly corrosion resistant metal such as stainless steel are required.

- vii. The use of reflective hardware is discouraged, especially in areas where conflict with other user groups is most likely to occur such as near multi-use trails, developed sites or viewpoints.
- viii. Camouflaging fixed anchors to match natural rock color is encouraged.
- ix. The removal of vegetation from cracks or rock faces to allow a route to become more climbable is discouraged.
- x. Using trees for natural anchors is discouraged. If using trees as natural anchors, care should be taken to prevent damage to the tree.
- xi. The removal of rock from its natural position will be allowed only when the rock to be removed poses a significant risk to the climbing party or a future climbing party.
- xii. Chipping, gluing, or attaching artificial holds is prohibited.
- xiii. When replacing unsafe fixed anchors, use of modern, commercially available hardware of a highly corrosion resistant metal such as stainless steel is required. A reasonable effort to remove the existing, unsafe hardware will be made and existing drill holes will be used in the installation of replacement fixed anchors whenever possible.
- xiv. The installation and removal of pitons does permanent damage to the rock and is strongly discouraged. Pitons should only be used when any other reasonably safe means of protecting the climbing party is non-existent.
- xv. The use of permanent quick draws (e.g., permadraws) is discouraged, but may be allowed on a case-by-case basis with consideration by CACC and BIP.
- xvi. The placement of fixed rope for the purpose of retreating from a climb, working a new project or establishing a new climbing route may be allowed under the following conditions: (1) the climbing party intends to return to continue the climb, and (2) the placement does not exceed a period of 7 days.
- xvii. Fixed software (e.g. rope, webbing, slings, cord, etc. left for the purpose of retreating from a climb) should be of a natural color similar to the surrounding rock.
- xviii. Rock hammers or drills should be used judiciously during sensitive times for wildlife (e.g. breeding, nesting, fledging) and in areas where other visitors may be disturbed.

C. GEAR CACHE

- i. Generally, the caching of development equipment at or near the base of a climb is not allowed.
- ii. The caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb in the event of a retreat due to weather, injury, or illness is allowed for a period not to exceed 7 days.