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News Releases

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HOW OLD IS THE GRAND CANYON? PARK SERVICE WON'T SAY — Orders to Cater to Creationists Makes National Park Agnostic on Geology

Washington, DC — Grand Canyon National Park is not permitted to give an official estimate of the geologic age of its principal feature, due to pressure from Bush administration appointees. Despite promising a prompt review of its approval for a book claiming the Grand Canyon was created by Noah's flood rather than by geologic forces, more than three years later no review has ever been done and the book remains on sale at the park, according to documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

“In order to avoid offending religious fundamentalists, our National Park Service is under orders to suspend its belief in geology,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch. “It is disconcerting that the official position of a national park as to the geologic age of the Grand Canyon is ‘no comment.’”

In a letter released today, PEER urged the new Director of the National Park Service (NPS), Mary Bomar, to end the stalling tactics, remove the book from sale at the park and allow park interpretive rangers to honestly answer questions from the public about the geologic age of the Grand Canyon. PEER is also asking Director Bomar to approve a pamphlet, suppressed since 2002 by Bush appointees, providing guidance for rangers and other interpretive staff in making distinctions between science and religion when speaking to park visitors about geologic issues.

In August 2003, Park Superintendent Joe Alston attempted to block the sale at park bookstores of *Grand Canyon: A Different View* by Tom Vail, a book claiming the Canyon developed on a biblical rather than an evolutionary time scale. NPS Headquarters, however, intervened and overruled Alston. To quiet the resulting furor, NPS Chief of Communications David Barna told reporters and members of Congress that there would be a high-level policy review of the issue.

According to a recent NPS response to a Freedom of Information Act request filed by PEER, no such review was ever requested, let alone conducted or completed.

Park officials have defended the decision to approve the sale of *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, claiming that park bookstores are like libraries, where the broadest range of views are displayed. In fact, however, both law and park policies make it clear that the park bookstores are more like schoolrooms rather than libraries. As such, materials are only to reflect the highest quality science and are supposed to closely support approved interpretive themes. Moreover, unlike a library the approval process is very selective. Records released to PEER show that during 2003, Grand Canyon officials rejected 22 books and other products for bookstore placement while approving only one new sale item — the creationist book.

Ironically, in 2005, two years after the Grand Canyon creationist controversy erupted, NPS approved a new directive on “Interpretation and Education (Director’s Order #6) which reinforces the posture that materials on the “history of the Earth must be based on the best scientific evidence available, as found in scholarly sources that have stood the test of scientific peer review and criticism [and] Interpretive and educational programs must refrain from appearing to endorse religious beliefs explaining natural processes.”

“As one park geologist said, this is equivalent of Yellowstone National Park selling a book entitled *Geysers of Old Faithful: Nostrils of Satan*,” Ruch added, pointing to the fact that previous NPS leadership ignored strong protests from both its own scientists and leading geological societies against the agency approval of the creationist book. “We sincerely hope that the new Director of the Park Service now has the autonomy to do her job.”

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[Read the PEER letter to NPS Director Bomar](#)

[View the NPS admission that no policy review on the creationist book has occurred](#)

[See the 2005 NPS Director's Order #6 on Interpretation](#)

8.4.2 Historical and Scientific Research.

Superintendents, historians, scientists, and interpretive staff are responsible for ensuring that park interpretive and educational programs and media are accurate and reflect current scholarship...Questions often arise round the presentation of geological, biological, and evolutionary processes. The interpretive and educational treatment used to explain the natural processes and **history of the Earth must be based on the best scientific evidence available, as found in scholarly sources that have stood the test of scientific peer review and criticism.** The facts, theories, and interpretations to be used will reflect the thinking of the scientific community in such fields as biology, geology, physics, astronomy, chemistry, and paleontology.

Interpretive and educational programs must refrain from appearing to endorse religious beliefs explaining natural processes. Programs, however, may acknowledge or explain other explanations of natural processes and events. (Emphasis added)

[Trace how the creationist book controversy started and grew](#)

[Look at tax dollars used to support the Bush administration program of "Faith-Based Parks"](#)



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