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## [Renewed concern about creationism at Grand Canyon National Park](#) [3]

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility -- "a national non-profit alliance of local, state and federal scientists, law enforcement officers, land managers and other professionals dedicated to upholding environmental laws and values" -- is charging the National Park Service with stalling on a promised review of a creationist book sold at the bookstores at Grand Canyon National Park. Although the park's bookstores are operated by a separate non-profit organization, the Grand Canyon Association, the National Park Service is responsible for approving the items that are sold there. In August 2003, the NPS approved the sale of *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, edited by Tom Vail and published by Master Books, the publishing arm of the Institute for Creation Research. *A Different View* expounds a young-earth creationist view of the geology of the canyon, and proclaims that "all contributions have been peer-reviewed to ensure a consistent and biblical perspective." In his review of the book, the geologist Wilfred Elders [described](#) [4] it as "'Exhibit A' of a new, slick strategy by biblical literalists to proselytize using a beautifully illustrated, multi-authored book about a spectacular and world-famous geological feature," adding, "Allowing the sale of this book within the National Park was unfortunate. In the minds of some buyers, this could imply NPS approval of young-earth creationists and their religious proselytizing."

After the sale of *A Different View* was approved, the superintendent of the park appealed to the NPS headquarters for "a review of the book in terms of its appropriateness," and the Chief of the Park Service's Geologic Resources Division recommended its removal, saying that it "does not use accurate, professional and scholarly knowledge; is not based on science but a specific religious doctrine; does not further the public's understanding of the Grand Canyon's existence; [and] does not further the mission of the National Park Service." Meanwhile, the sale of the book became a matter of public [controversy](#) [5]: Elders's review appeared in *Eos* (the weekly newsletter of the American Geophysical Union); the presidents of the American Paleontological Society, the American Geophysical Union, the National

Association of Geoscience Teachers, the Association of American State Geologists, the Society for Vertebrate Paleontology, the American Geological Institute, and the Geological Society of America signed a joint letter to the NPS, urging that *A Different View* be removed "from shelves where buyers are given the impression that the book is about earth science and its content endorsed by the National Park Service"; and stories about the controversy appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times*. A spokesperson for the NPS repeatedly assured the press and Congress that the promised review would be forthcoming.

In a December 28, 2006, [press release](#) [6], however, PEER charged, "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." Jeff Ruch, executive director of PEER, commented, "As one park geologist said, this is equivalent of Yellowstone National Park selling a book entitled *Geysers of Old Faithful: Nostrils of Satan*." In a December 28, 2006, [letter](#) [7] (PDF), PEER urged the new director of NPS, Mary Bomar, to remove the book from sale at the park's bookstores and museums as well as to "[p]rovide training to the interpretive staff at Grand Canyon NP regarding how to answer questions from the public concerning the geologic age of the Canyon and related matters; and ... [a]pprove an updated version of the long-stalled pamphlet 'National Park Service Geologic Interpretive Programs: Distinguishing Science from Religion' for distribution to agency interpretive staff." It ought to be noted that PEER is not charging the NPS with forbidding its interpretive staff to present the scientific facts about the canyon's age and geology, but only with not providing its staff with the resources it needs to do so effectively, especially when faced with park visitors who have questions about, or even embrace, views that reject those facts on religious grounds.

Prompted by PEER's press release, the controversy over the sale of *A Different View* is beginning to attract attention again in the media, with the *Arizona Daily Sun* (January 4, 2007) [offering](#) [8] a report in which a spokesperson for the NPS was quoted as saying, "We do not use the creationist text in our teaching, nor do we endorse its content. However, it is not our place to censor alternate beliefs." But the *Sacramento Bee* (January 4, 2007) [suggested](#) [9] **[Link broken]**, in a forceful and cogent editorial entitled "Don't use parks to promote creationism," "A new year and a new National Park Service director mark an opportunity for change. Here's an easy one. Settle the 3-year-old controversy about a creationist account of the Grand Canyon." The editorial argued that "Mary Bomar, the new National Park Service director, should send a message that programs and materials in national parks present the best scientific evidence and don't endorse any particular religious beliefs," and concluded by urging Bomar to "fix this easily and quickly: Remove the book from sale from within the park; its proper place is for sale in private bookstores outside the public park. Equally important, finish the long-delayed pamphlet 'National Park Service Geologic Interpretive Program: Distinguishing Science from Religion' and distribute it to park rangers. The nation's public parks are not the place to promote religious theories about the formation and development of Earth."

A spokesperson for the NPS, David Barna, [told](#) [10] *The New York Times* (January 5, 2007) that there was no formal review of whether the bookstores ought to discontinue selling *A Different View* in part because of differences among the NPS's specialists. According to the *Times*, "When officials got together to discuss the book, the geologists and natural resource specialists would say, 'Get this book out of here,' Mr. Barna said. 'But the education and interpretation people would say: 'Wait a minute. If your science is so sound, the fact that there are differences of opinion should not scare you away.'" In a written statement, the *Times* reported, Barna "notes that Park Service management policies require reliance on 'the best scientific evidence available' and, as a result, rangers tell visitors that "the Colorado River basin

has developed in the past 40 million years." But the *Times* also reported that "the guidelines also say that material available from concessionaires in national parks should adhere to the standards used to evaluate Park Service materials." PEER's executive director Jeff Ruch was quoted as contending that selling the book promoted fundamentalist Christian views: "This is government establishment of religion in a fairly fundamental way, if you pardon the pun."

*(Final paragraph added January 7, 2007.)*

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