

Ms. Mary Bomar  
Director  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

December 28, 2006

Dear Ms. Bomar:

On behalf of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) I am writing to ask you to redress both a breach in National Park Service (NPS) policies and a lapse in your agency's candor with the public and Congress. In particular, PEER urges you to remove a bureaucratic straitjacket imposed by subordinates during the tenure of your predecessor which prevents NPS interpretive staff from communicating honestly with the public about the geologic age of the Grand Canyon.

In August 2003, the Park Service approved a creationist text, *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, for sale in park bookstores and museums. The book by Tom Vail claims that the Grand Canyon is really only a few thousand years old, developing over a biblical rather than an evolutionary time scale. That same month, the Grand Canyon National Park superintendent appealed to NPS Headquarters for a "review of the book in terms of its appropriateness" for sale in a park-sponsored facility.

In repeated public statements and in response to inquiries from members of Congress, NPS Chief of Communications David Barna stated that NPS would conduct a high-level policy review. He distributing talking points stating: "We hope to have a final decision in February [2004]." In late February 2004, Mr. Barna crafted a letter which was sent to concerned members of Congress stating: "We hope to have a final decision on the book in March 2004." That draft was rewritten in June and finally sent out to Congressional representatives with no completion date for the review at all.

In fact, the promised review never occurred. According to responses PEER obtained from NPS under the Freedom of Information Act, NPS deliberately avoided conducting the review in order to let the controversy die down. Meanwhile, the Grand Canyon Association ordered hundreds more copies of the book and offered it for a time for sale on the internet site as "natural history" (it is now the sole offering in a heretofore nonexistent category labeled "inspirational").

During this same period, a review by Park Service geologists not only found the book wildly inaccurate but that its sale violated agency policies and undercut its scientific education programs. On January 25, 2004 David Shaver, the Chief of the Park Service's Geologic Resources Division sent a memo (enclosed) to NPS Headquarters calling for removal of the book, concluding --

“Our review of ...NPS policies and *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, lead us to conclude that this book: 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; does not further the mission of the National Park Service...and finally, that this book should not have been approved for sale in NPS affiliated book sales.”

At the same time, Park Service leadership has blocked publication of guidance for park rangers and other interpretative staff that labeled creationism as lacking any scientific basis. As a consequence, NPS staff has no official guidance as to how to answer questions from the public concerning topics such as creationists' “young earth” claims. Further, media inquiries to the Grand Canyon superintendent seeking an official statement on the geologic age of the Canyon have produced replies such as “no comment” and referral of the reporter to NPS Headquarters.

Ironically, in January 2005, your Director's Order # 6 was amended to provide:

**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)

In the view of PEER, the practices at Grand Canyon NP with respect to the book *Grand Canyon: A Different View* and creationism are clearly at variance with the statutory and policy mandates underpinning your agency. We would request that you review this case and –

1. Remove the book from sale at park bookstores and museums;

2. Provide 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
3. Approve an updated version of the long-stalled pamphlet “National Park Service Geologic Interpretive Programs: Distinguishing Science from Religion” for distribution to agency interpretive staff.

Continued delay by NPS in forthrightly addressing this issue only undermines the credibility of your agency in its policies and pronouncements with respect to its educational mission and dedication to promoting excellence in science.

We would appreciate hearing from you when you come to a decision on this matter. If you have any questions about our concern, or require any additional documentation, please contact me at 202 265-PEER.

Cordially,

Jeff Ruch  
Executive Director