

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility News Release (www.peer.org)

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RELIGION ON DISPLAY IN NATIONAL PARKS — Christian Fundamentalist Influence on Park Service Decisions "Faith-Based Parks" Decried

Washington, DC -- In a series of recent decisions, the National Park Service has approved the display of religious symbols and Bible verses, as well as the sale of creationist books giving a non-evolutionary explanation for the Grand Canyon and other natural wonders within national parks, according to documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). Also, under pressure from conservative groups, the Park Service has agreed to edit the videotape that has been shown at the Lincoln Memorial since 1995 to remove any image of gay and abortion rights demonstrations that occurred at the memorial.

"The Park Service leadership now caters exclusively to conservative Christian fundamentalist groups," stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch. "The Bush Administration appears to be sponsoring a program of Faith-Based Parks."

This July, NPS Deputy Director Donald Murphy, ordered the Grand Canyon National Park to return three bronze plaques bearing biblical verses to public viewing areas on the Canyon's South Rim. Murphy overruled the park superintendent who had directed the plaques' removal based on legal advice from the Interior Department that the religious displays violated the First Amendment. In a letter to the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary, the group sponsoring the plaques, Murphy apologized for "any intrusion resulting from" the temporary removal of the plaques quoting Psalms 68:4, 66:4 and 104:24 and pledged "further legal analysis and policy review" before any new action is taken.

This past summer, the Park Service also 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 on a biblical rather than an evolutionary time scale. 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.

Last month, the Park Service announced that it would alter an eight-minute video containing photos and footage of demonstrations and other events taking place at the Lincoln Memorial. Conservative groups have asked to cut out footage of gay rights, pro-choice and anti-Vietnam War demonstrations because it implies that "Lincoln would have supported homosexual and abortion 'rights' as well as feminism." The Park Service has promised to develop a "more balanced" version that include rallies of the Christian group Promise Keepers and pro-Gulf War demonstrators though these events did not take place at the Memorial.

The Park Service is also engaged in an extended legal battle to continue displaying an eight-foot-tall cross, planted atop a 30-foot-high rock outcropping in the Mojave National Preserve in California. PEER Board Member and former-Park Service manager Frank Buono filed suit to force removal of the cross. That suit is now pending before the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

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Read NPS Deputy Director [Donald Murphy's letter to the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary](#)

Learn more about the book giving the [creationist explanation for the Grand Canyon](#)

Examine the [Mojave Cross lawsuit](#)