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CC:
Subject: Grand Canyon Issues

Nathan, et al.

I know you are getting calls about the Grand Canyon Book, and probably the religious plaques.

Below is some verbage you can provide to Congressional offices for their use in responding to public inquiries.

David



Grand Canyon Issues - feb 2.d

National Park Service
Grand Canyon National Park
Update on issues: February 2, 2004

Grand Canyon National Park – Sale of Book – Grand Canyon: A Different View in Grand Canyon Association Bookstores

In July 2003, the book Grand Canyon: A Different View, by Tom Vail, was approved as a sales item in Grand Canyon Association (GCA) bookstores within Grand Canyon National Park. The book claims that the Grand Canyon is only a few thousand years old, developing on a biblical rather than an evolutionary timeframe. Shortly after the book became available, some people raised concerns about its appropriateness and suggested that the book be removed. In August the Washington Office of Communications agreed to facilitate a review of the book for its appropriateness as a sales item at bookstores in the park. The book is currently being reviewed by the NPS offices of Policy, Natural Resources, and Interpretation. We hope to have final decision in February.

In December, the park received a letter from the American Geological Institute, opposing the sale of the book. The letter was accompanied by a letter signed by presidents of seven geoscience organizations expressing concern "about a young-earth creationist book currently being sold in bookstores at Grand Canyon National Park."

As of early January approximately 300 books had been sold and GCA continues to keep a moderate supply on hand pending a decision by the NPS.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) issued a news release on December

22, 2003 regarding religion in national parks. The news release mentions the removal and subsequent return of three religious plaques at Grand Canyon, approval by the National Park Service to sell the book in GCA bookstores, and video at Lincoln Memorial. The news release prompted several news stories over the last several weeks, which peaked public interest.

Grand Canyon National Park – Religious Plaques

In the 1960s or 70s three religious plaques, constructed of fiberglass and measuring approximately one foot square, were prominently affixed to three federally-owned buildings assigned to the park concessioner and open to the public. The buildings are Hermits Rest, Desert View Watchtower and Lookout Studio, all of which were designed by nationally-renowned architect Mary Jane Colter and are National Historic Landmarks. The park's administrative history does not reveal either the date of the plaque installation or whether the NPS communicated any formal approval to the then-concessioner, the Fred Harvey Company when the plaques were installed. The concessioner has indicated that it approved the plaque installation by a religious organization named "Kanaan in the Desert," a branch of the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary.

On February 28, 2003, the park superintendent received an email from the National Capital Area office of the American Civil Liberties Union inquiring about the plaques and asking the park to "shed[] light on why they are there." On May 5, 2003, the ACLU sent the park superintendent a brief follow-up email.

After consulting with the Regional Director, Intermountain Regional Office, and the Field Solicitor, Santa Fe, the superintendent asked for the removal of the plaques. The decision was based on previous federal court decisions, which had ruled that the permanent installation of symbols or expressions of a particular religion on lands or buildings controlled by the federal government violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

Shortly after the plaques were removed, media and public interest became intense. The park received over 100 phone calls, and thousands of emails and letters were received by the park, the NPS in Washington, D.C. and the Intermountain Regional Office in Colorado.

On July 18, 2003, a letter from NPS Deputy Director Donald Murphy to the Sisterhood, stated that the plaques would be reinstalled in the park if they were returned by the Sisterhood. He promised that after they are reinstalled, "[w]e will [] promptly undertake a more in depth legal and policy review. That review is currently taking place in the Department of the Interior Office of the Solicitor.

Contact: National Park Service, Public Affairs Office, tele: 202-208-6843