

## RESOLUTION

of the

### ELMORE COUNTY COMMISSION

WHEREAS, about 80 million years ago, the Wetumpka area was reputed to have witnessed the impact of a meteorite with an estimated diameter of 1,100 feet which hit with a force equal to 1,000 tons of TNT and landed in the shallow sea that covered the area at that time; and

WHEREAS, this meteorite would have created a tsunami (tidal wave) of perhaps 140 to 249 meters in height devastating coast lines half way around the world and throwing up debris which would have landed as far away as what is now the Gulf of Mexico; and

WHEREAS, said meteorite traveled in a flat trajectory from the southeast to the northwest causing the formation of crater walls, the highest and most visible of which now are the northwest and north rims, located in the Bald Knob-Harrogate Springs area; and

WHEREAS, these crater walls are among the most important and beautiful geological features in the Wetumpka area and were confirmed as a star wound (astrobleme) in the 1990s; and

WHEREAS, no effort has been made by any private or governmental entity to acquire or conserve the site which is on private property in various stages of development; and

WHEREAS, the Wetumpka area impact crater (astrobleme) should be properly utilized and preserved as a tremendous asset to the city, the county, and the state of Alabama.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Elmore County Commission does hereby agree to establish a Wetumpka Impact Crater Study Commission. Upon adoption of a mirror resolution by the City Council of Wetumpka, Alabama, nine persons shall be appointed as members of the Impact Crater Commission. Four will be appointed by the County Commission and four by the City Council. The Chairperson will be jointly selected and appointed by the two bodies. At least one, but not more than two, of the members appointed by each body will be property owners whose land lies within the crater.

The purpose of the Commission will be to prepare a report to be submitted to both bodies which will recommend actions to be taken by private and governmental agencies to utilize and conserve the impact crater and its surroundings. The Commission may utilize technical experts and advisors as it sees fit. Commissioners will serve on a volunteer basis. Reasonable and justified travel expenses may be paid. Funding will be jointly agreed upon by the County Commission and the City Council. Recommendations must be approved by a majority of the Study Commissioners.

The Impact Crater Commission will hold its first meeting no later than one month from the date of its official creation, which shall be the date that this Resolution is adopted by the latter of the two entities, and the Commission shall submit its final report no later than six months from the date of its first meeting.

Agreed upon this 23<sup>rd</sup> day of May, 2002.

Elmore County Commission

By   
Its Chairman

# Wetumpka Impact Crater Study Commission Report

April, 2003

## I. INTRODUCTION.

A. As directed by the Elmore County Commission and the Wetumpka City Council (see Exhibit 1), the Wetumpka Impact Crater Study Commission has spent the last six months exploring the significance of the Wetumpka Impact Crater and how best for our community to preserve, promote and gain public access to some portion or portions of the site with paramount consideration of private landowners.

B. The Crater (Exhibit 2) is a significant scientific discovery. It is the best preserved marine impact crater in the world; scientists from around the globe have expressed interest in studying the site, according to Dr. David King, professor of geology, Auburn University. The crater is the site of the most devastating natural disaster in our state's history and could provide many opportunities for educational activities and tourism.

## II. STUDY METHODS.

A. The Study Commission enlisted the input of various local, state and national parties in an effort to discover the most plausible opportunities to preserve some portion of the crater and make it accessible to the public.

1. Dr. David King, the research scientist who established the authenticity of the site, met with the study group and discussed the scientific significance of the impact site and how it was authenticated. The rapid development (compare Exhibits 2 and 3) of the entire crater site was discussed and the need to identify critical areas for preservation. He also expressed the desire that the site be considered for educational facilities for students of geology and physical science.

2. Representatives of the National Park Service, National Forest Service, State Forest Service, State Department of Conservation (Forever Wild), State Department of Transportation, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, the Trust for Public Lands, the State Geologist, private developers, private landowners, Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission, a consultant for Jasmine Hill Gardens, and participants in a public hearing all gave input to the commission on areas of concern, development possibilities and limitations as well as funding possibilities.

## III. OPTIONS CONSIDERED.

Some of the possibilities that emerged during the study are:

A. Use of the Rest Area on U.S. 231 South as an information and interpretive park which would include all area attractions.

B. Use of the Forestry Commission property and the old fire tower on Fire Tower Road as a park and observation point.

C. Use of private lands for trails (see Exhibit 4 for current land ownership).

- D. Land acquisition through purchase, lease or gifts. Private organizations, such as the Trust for public Land, may be able to help.
- E. Use of Jasmine Hill Gardens as an observation and interpretive point.
- F. Development of camp sites.
- G. Development of educational facilities for the study of the crater.
- H. Development by private investors of a Natural History Museum and IMAX theater.
- I. Use of professional graphics and interpretive information.
- J. Establishment of a volunteer organization for fundraising and support activities.
- K. Development of an on going management plan.
- L. Pursuit of designation as a Heritage Corridor.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS.

After much deliberation over lots of information, the Study Commission arrived at some short term recommendations with the hope that many of the above possibilities will continue to be pursued. The Commission feels that there are three primary recommendations you should consider immediately with two additional areas for consideration.

A. The primary recommendations are:

1. The City of Wetumpka and Elmore County should work with the Elmore County Economic Development Authority to establish a Tourism Task Force to address the development of tourism possibilities in our area to include the impact crater. As we worked on this project, it became apparent that there is a great need for some continuity of effort in the development of the impact crater site for conservation and access. It is also noted that several other resources such as Fort Toulouse, the Coosa River, Jasmine Hills Gardens etc. are also an integral part of any tourism package in the immediate Wetumpka area. It is further noted that there is a need to establish an ongoing group to persue the specific issues related to the impact crater such as land acquisition, site access, interpretive information, sinage etc. and to coordinate with the Tourism Task Force the development of the site for tourism. This Impact Crater Study Commission has assembled a vast amount of information on the site and issues relating to the site. Therefore we recommend the inclusion of some of the members of this body in any ongoing crater development group.

2. The City of Wetumpka should immediately open negotiations with the State Department of Transportation to either acquire outright, or acquire the use of, the Rest Area on U.S. 231 South as a park for interpretive information about the Crater, as well as a tourist information and welcome center for the Wetumpka area. This is considered an attractive option for several reasons. From our preliminary information, this is a real possibility that would require little or no capital outlay for a facility with extremely high visibility, parking, rest rooms, picnic areas and a small visitors center already in place. The site is in the southern disturbed area of the impact crater and provides an observation point from the crater rim out over the river flood plains. Interpretive signage and displays would need to be added and the upkeep and maintenance of the park considered. The center could be

gated and operated at designated hours with the possibility of one employee and/or volunteer manning.

3. The Elmore County Commission should negotiate with the State Forestry Commission to either acquire outright, or acquire the use of, 10 acres of Forestry Commission owned property on Fire Tower Road which is the site of an old metal fire tower. Develop this site into a park for observation and interpretive information with possible trails and picnic areas. Explore the safe use of the tower as an observation facility. Another option for this property is for Forestry to transfer it to the Conservation Department, which would then develop it into a state park. This possibility should be explored.

B. Our secondary recommendations (for the Board or Commission to be established) are:

1. In cooperation with secondary and higher education officials, develop educational facilities for the study of this area by students of all ages. This may require sleeping and dining facilities, classroom space and perhaps some type of lab space, as well as agreements with private landowners for access to certain sites in the area. We believe this to be a great opportunity to share our natural resource with the world.

2. Pursue either the acquisition of parcels of land in and around the crater, or the long term use of such property, as a part of the effort to conserve this natural phenomenon for posterity and for future study. This recommendation may be the most urgent, since the crater area is being developed for residential and business use at a very rapid rate.

#### V. CONCLUSION.

The Wetumpka Impact Crater Study Commission found our task to be exciting, challenging and frustrating. The exciting possibilities that exist for the use of the impact crater, the challenges of trying to preserve the site and the rights of the property owners, and the frustrations of seeing the opportunities and searching for ways to see them realized, have made our task somewhat of a roller coaster ride. We do, however, believe that the recommendations made above are realistic and achievable through the cooperative efforts of the entire community and will begin to build a strong foundation for the conservation and use of our many natural resources.

Respectfully submitted;

Hazel Jones  
Bill Gray  
Barry Blackwell  
Neal Acker  
Mary Belmont  
Clark Dorsey  
Lynda Feaga