

Testimony of Larry D. Groth
City Manager
City of Waco
For
H.R. 1376
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
House Natural Resources Committee
April 23, 2009

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, my name is Larry D. Groth and I am City Manager for the City of Waco. I am here today to urge your favorable consideration for H.R. 1376.

We are extremely fortunate to have a paleontological site in Waco that has national significance. In 1978, two of our local citizens discovered some large bones in a ravine in north Waco near the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque Rivers. This discovery was the first of more than 24 Columbian Mammoths ranging from 3 to 55 years old, which appear to have died in a single event approximately 68,000 years ago. This makes the Waco site the largest concentration in North America of extinct mammoths dying from the same event. It provides a unique opportunity for the National Park Service to understand and interpret the behavior and ecology of an extinct species.

This discovery has already received international attention with archeologists, geologists, and paleontologists from the U. S., Sweden, and Great Britain visiting the site during the past several years. Integrity of the scientific data has been protected since the site has been under investigation by a single agency, Baylor University, since 1978. The City of Waco and Baylor University have partnered to protect the remains and secure sufficient property surrounding the site for future development of the resource. Over 105 acres surrounding the dig site has been secured with access to the Bosque River to enhance recreational opportunities.

To date, 24 mammoths and one camel have been discovered. Additional remains at the site indicate the presence of an extinct saber tooth cat, dwarf antelope, and a giant tortoise. There are also indications of more mammoth remains near the existing excavations.

In December 2002, a special resource study by the National Park Service was authorized for the Waco site. The study found that the Waco Mammoth Site met the requirements of being nationally significant, being a suitable addition to the system and a feasible addition to the system. The need for direct management by the National Park Service was not absolute, but a partnership was highly recommended to achieve the development and protection goals of the site to its fullest extent.

In 2006, the City of Waco and Baylor University chartered the Waco Mammoth Foundation to initiate a major fund raising campaign to construct the first phase of site

development which will provide for a permanent structure to protect the dig site, a small visitor and ticketing center, and access to the site. Congressman Chet Edwards secured a \$200,000 grant through the Save America's Treasures Program administered by the National Park Service to assist in this effort.

I am pleased to report that along with this grant and other private donations we have raised over \$3.3 million. A complete master plan for the entire site was developed and construction plans for Phase One development were prepared. Good construction bids were obtained and construction is underway.

Favorable consideration for H.R. 1376 would greatly enhance our efforts to protect and interpret this fantastic national treasure. Bringing in the National Park Service as a partner with the City of Waco and Baylor University would greatly strengthen an already strong relationship. It would provide an opportunity to maximize each of our strengths in the management and development of this resource. We recommend the selection of Management Option C as outlined in the special resource study which would formalize this type of relationship.

Our community is committed to continue working with the National Park Service for full development of the site including future required fund raising for capital needs.

Again, I thank you for allowing me to address this issue and request your favorable consideration of H.R. 1376. Also, we greatly appreciate Congressman Edwards' efforts on our behalf and for this unique opportunity for our nation.