

RESOLUTION NO. 20190606-048

WHEREAS, Austin resident, William Hart (Bill) Russell's passing on March 21, 2019, has poignantly left a huge void in the world of caving; and

WHEREAS, Bill Russell was recognized as one of the most prolific cavers on the North American continent, being awarded a Certificate of Merit from the National Speleological Society, as well as made a Fellow of the Society and Honorary Member; and

WHEREAS, Bill Russell is credited with discovery, in 1966, of Sistema Huautla in the rugged mountains of Oaxaca, Mexico; considered one of the world's premier caves - so deep and extensive that it is still being explored today and is now known to be the deepest proven hydrological system in the western hemisphere and the eighth deepest in the world; and

WHEREAS, in these ongoing expeditions into the Huautla cave system, one of the passages that is expected to connect to the system is named "Bill Russell's Delight", being a 150-meter long, tight struggle with knife-like shredding blades of chert; and

WHEREAS, Bill Russell put his skills and passion to work at home reopening, mapping and preserving our local caves and was recognized by many as a brother, father, and grandfather figure within the caving community, mentoring and inspiring every cave scientist and cave digger working in Central Texas; and

WHEREAS, Bill Russell's work, along with the work done by those he mentored, contributed greatly to the discovery and protection of caves in the City of Austin and Wildlands Conservation Division; and

WHEREAS, many of the caves currently managed under the Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan required excavation for exploration due to deliberate and human-caused fill and Austin's rich heritage of protecting caves and associated wildlands for the preservation of water quality can be attributed to many people, but to no one more so than Bill Russell; and

WHEREAS, Bill Russell discovered the deep cave of Blowing Sink, digging through 12 feet of clay fill to reach Winter Woods cave and giving Blowing Sink its name because of the high rate of airflow blowing from its entrance; and

WHEREAS, Blowing Sink Cave provides the only known humanly accessible route to the water table within the Barton Springs Segment of the Edwards Aquifer; and

WHEREAS, the aquifer's ability to remain healthy and recharged with fresh water from rains and the viability of continuing spring flows depends on caves being open and not blocked or filled; and

WHEREAS, the Balcones Canyonland Conservation Plan (BCCP) federal permit issued to the City of Austin and Travis County in 1996 requires that the permit holders "acquire and manage or implement formal management agreements...adequate to preserve the environmental integrity of ...Blowing Sink"; and

WHEREAS, from 1997 to 2000, Bill Russell lobbied to have the land currently named Blowing Sink Research Management Area donated to the City of Austin as a preserve so that its rich recharge and cave treasures could be protected and further explored by local cavers; and

WHEREAS, the land will continue to use the given names for its features such as Blowing Sink Cave, Brownlee Cave, Sinky Dinky Cave, Sunspot Cave, Williams Well Cave, Winter Woods Cave, Jody Lane Cave and Wyoka Cave;

WHEREAS, the Watershed Protection Department has spent significant funds to open and stabilize several recharge features on the Blowing Sink Research Management Area and more work is needed to continue to open and maintain their function; **NOW, THEREFORE**,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The City Manager is directed to initiate proceedings under City Code Section 14-1-39 for the renaming of the Blowing Sink Research Management Area to the William H Russell Karst Preserve.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to coordinate Austin Water, the Parks and Recreation Department, and the Watershed Protection Department to collaboratively develop and establish a shared land management plan for the William H Russell Karst Preserve with the goal of protecting water quality, increasing recharge, protecting sensitive and endangered species habitat, and continuing the legacy of Bill H Russell's work on behalf of the City of Austin to further explore and document the City's karst resources with knowledgeable stakeholders in the community. The City Manager is directed to report back to Council on this land management plan by October 3, 2019.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

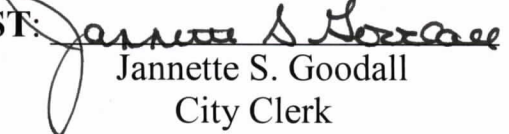
The City Manager is directed to develop a report on existing cave and karst feature enhancement or restoration projects and programs that have been

implemented or are in planning by Austin Water, the Parks and Recreation Department, and the Watershed Protection Department. The report should include potential opportunities for process improvements, regulatory considerations, additional water quality monitoring, guided public access, and best practices for engaging knowledgeable stakeholders in the community. The City Manager is directed to report back to Council on this report by January 2020.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The City Manager is directed to develop a memorandum of understanding among Austin Water, the Parks and Recreation Department, and the Watershed Protection Department to address cave restoration and water quality monitoring related to caves on City-owned land. The City Manager is directed to report back to Council on this memorandum of understanding by March 1, 2020.

ADOPTED: June 6, 2019

ATTEST: 
Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk