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Archeological Survey Of The Proposed Capitol Parks Little League Ball Fields, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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Archeological Survey Of The Proposed Capitol Parks Little League Ball Fields, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas

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**ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE PROPOSED CAPITOL PARKS
LITTLE LEAGUE BALL FIELDS, SAN ANTONIO,
BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS**

by
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LETTER REPORT NO. 926

submitted to
Adams Environmental, Inc.
San Antonio, Texas
and
Cude Engineers
San Antonio, Texas

by
Prewitt and Associates, Inc.
Cultural Resources Services
Austin, Texas

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FINAL REPORT

TEXAS ANTIQUITIES PERMIT NO. 8379

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ABSTRACT

On April 10 and June 6, 2018, personnel with Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an intensive archeological survey on 23.7 acres of undeveloped land to be utilized for the creation new Little League baseball fields just east of the intersection of Wurzbach Parkway and Wetmore Road in northeast San Antonio, Texas. This survey was conducted under the direction of Adams Environmental, Inc., for Cude Engineers, partially under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8379. The proposed development will be done as a private-public partnership. Most of the project area (23.0 acres) is privately owned land (Capitol Aggregates, Inc.). The public component of the project will involve use of City of San Antonio bond money to construct a road and bridge to access the property on its southeast side. This will be done on 0.7 acres of publicly owned land, and only this part of the project is governed by the terms of the antiquities permit.

No prehistoric or historic artifacts or archeological sites were identified during the survey. The access bridge and road section has seen extensive disturbance from development along the eastern creek bank, and the main western section of the proposed park has seen disturbance associated with land clearing and the construction of embankments along Wurzbach Parkway. Shovel testing and examination of cut banks in this western section found no evidence of archeological sites. The proposed project will not impact any archeological resources that meet eligibility criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a State Antiquities Landmark. Prewitt and Associates, Inc., recommends that the proposed project be allowed to proceed without additional archeological investigations.

CURATION

The archeological survey did not find any artifacts, so the project does not require artifact curation. Project records and photographs currently housed at the offices of Prewitt and Associates, Inc., will be transferred to the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory in Austin for permanent curation.

INTRODUCTION

On April 10 and June 6, 2018, personnel with Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an intensive archeological survey on 23.7 acres of undeveloped land to be utilized for the creation new Little League baseball fields just east of the intersection of Wurzbach Parkway and Wetmore Road in northeast San Antonio, Texas (Figure 1). This survey was conducted under the direction of Adams Environmental, Inc., for Cude Engineers, partially under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8379, to fulfill the requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and associated regulations 36 CFR 800; the Antiquities Code of Texas (Texas Natural Resource Code of 1977, Title 9, Chapter 191, VTCS 6145-9); and the City of San Antonio's Historic Preservation and Design Section of the Unified Development Code (Article 6 35-360-634).

The proposed development will be done as a private-public partnership. Most of the project area (23.0 acres) is privately owned land (Capitol Aggregates, Inc.), and development there will be done by Future Fields, Inc. The public component of the project will involve use of City of San Antonio bond money to construct a road and bridge to access the property on its southeast side. This will be done on 0.7 acres of publicly owned land, and only this part of the project is governed by the terms of Texas Antiquities Permit No. 8379. The project will entail construction of five ball fields, a parking lot, access road and bridge, a concessions stand, batting cages, a playground, and associated utilities. The horizontal area of potential effects is 23.7 acres (23.0 acres privately owned and 0.7 acres publicly owned). Most ground-disturbing activities will be restricted to the upper 1.5 ft, but some disturbance could extend as deep as 5 ft. Hence, the vertical area of potential effects is 5 ft.

ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The project area is on gently sloping terrain immediately west of an unnamed tributary of Salado Creek, about 1.2 km north-northwest of the confluence of those streams. It is on the leading edge of the Balcones Escarpment in north-central Bexar County and along the transitional boundary between the Blackland Prairie to the southeast and the Edwards Plateau to the northwest (Arbingast et al. 1973:6; Griffith et al. 2004; McMahan et al. 1984:Figure 1). This portion of the Blackland Prairie is characterized by rolling to nearly level tall-grass plains underlain by soft interbedded marls, chinks, limestones, and shales. The scarp along the edge of the Edwards Plateau is a rugged dissected landscape of limestone hills and canyons created by extensive stream downcutting and headward erosion. According to the Geologic Atlas of Texas (Bureau of Economic Geology 1983), the area is on the outer edge of a wide band of Pleistocene terrace alluvium deposited by Salado Creek and its tributaries. This deposit is inset into Upper Cretaceous Pecan Gap chalk and chalky marl. Along the escarpment, the mapped terrace deposits primarily consist of calcareous gravels mixed with sands, silts, and clays. No Holocene alluvium is mapped in the vicinity of the project area.

Undifferentiated, nearly level, frequently flooded Tinn and Frio soils are mapped along and immediately adjacent to the tributary that borders the southeast

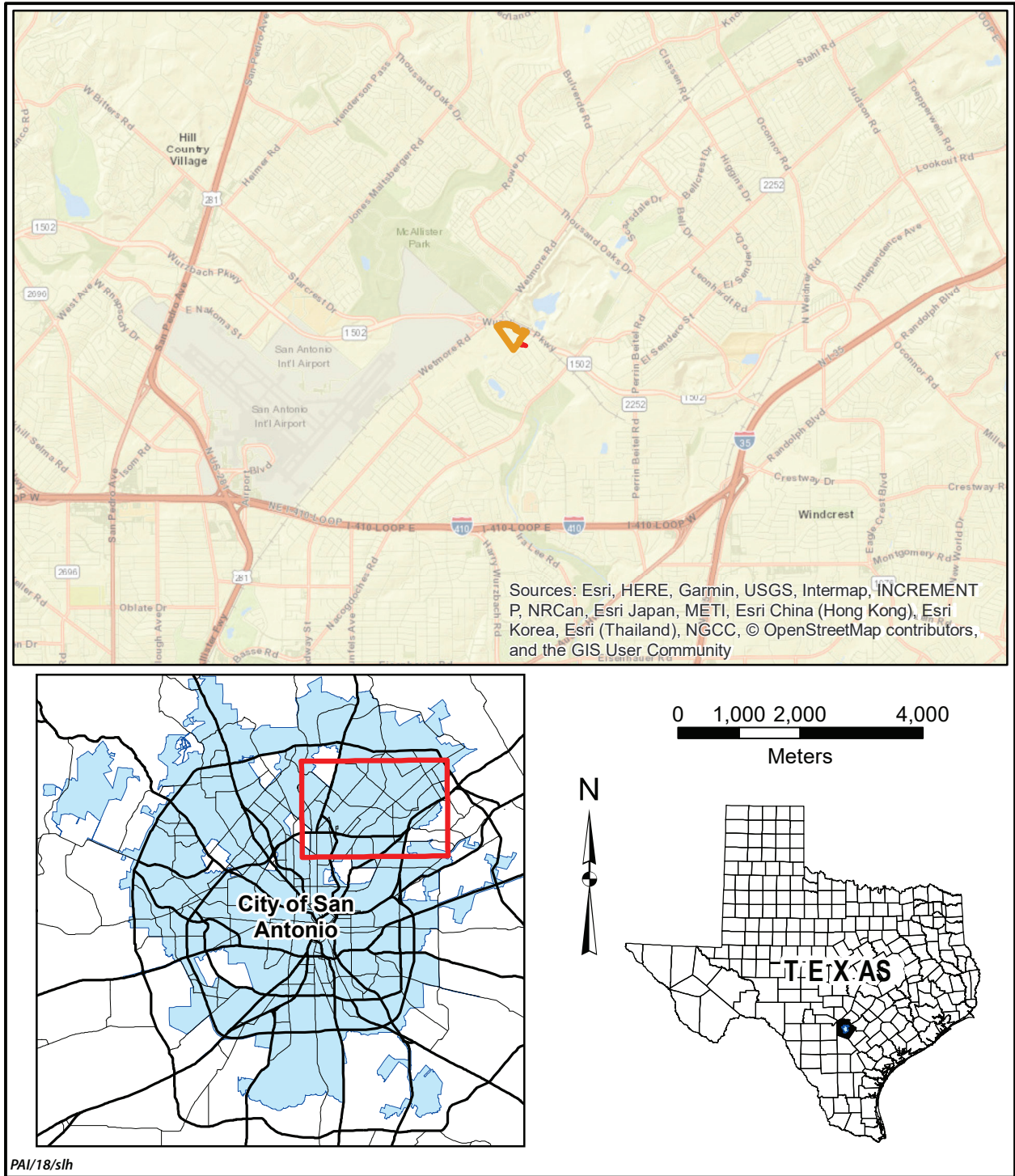


Figure 1. Project location map.

side of the survey area. These very deep, moderately well-drained soils formed in calcareous loamy and clayey alluvium derived from ancient geologic deposits. Nearly level Lewisville silty clay is mapped across gently sloping terrain in the remainder of the area west of the stream. Lewisville soils occur on nearly level, broad terraces

along area creeks and rivers. They are very deep, well-drained, calcareous upland soils that formed in ancient loamy and clayey calcareous sediments (SoilWeb Earth 2018; Taylor et al. 1991:25). Tinn series soils are Vertisols; the other listed soils are Mollisols (SoilWeb Earth 2018). The archeological potential for naturally buried prehistoric sites in and adjacent to the project area varies according to geologic and geomorphic setting. Based on these factors alone, terrain away from the existing stream channel has limited potential. The narrow tributary floodplain consisting of Tinn and Frio soils has the greatest potential for naturally buried archeological sites, but any such deposits would have been subject to natural channel meander and scouring and recent channel modification.

The Bexar County climate is classified as modified subtropical and is predominantly marine in the summer and continental in the winter (Taylor et al. 1991:102). The climate of the Blackland Prairie physiographic unit is classified as modified humid subtropical with Gulf-influenced hot summers and continental-influenced mild winters. The Edwards Plateau physiographic unit is classified as subtropical steppe (Natural Fibers Information Center 1987:10–12). Seasonal temperature extremes exceeding 100°F and dipping below 32°F occur in both regions but are more frequent on the Edwards Plateau. The mean annual precipitation for Bexar County is 29.1 inches (739 mm). Precipitation is distributed throughout the year, with peaks in the late spring and early fall months (Natural Fibers Information Center 1987:49; Taylor et al. 1991:102).

As with landscape and climate, the biota of Bexar County differ east to west with geographical overlap of some species. Flora and fauna of the Edwards Plateau and Blackland Prairie are defined as Balconian and Texan, respectively (Blair 1950). Although the dominant vegetative regime for the project area was previously listed as mesquite-live oak-bluewood parklands (Frye et al. 1984), the area is now characterized by extensive suburban development. The region once supported short to tall grasses with widely scattered mesquite, elm, hackberry, and pecan trees on stream terraces and denser stands of elm, hackberry, oak, pecan, and ash trees along tributary channels.

RESULTS OF FILE SEARCH

Review of the Texas Historical Commission's Archeological Sites Atlas in February 2018 revealed one documented archeological site and nine previous archeological investigations within 1 km of the project area. The project area is completely encompassed by a large survey area that extends north along the east side of Wetmore Road. This area was part of a larger 1976–1977 reconnaissance archeological survey and assessment of more than 11 drainages and 3 sewage treatment plant areas on the northern and southern peripheries of San Antonio that was conducted for the city by the Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Texas at San Antonio (Fox 1977:1). Another large survey area northeast of the Wurzbach Parkway/Wetmore Road intersection overlaps most of the 1976–1977 survey; it may have been triggered by planned activities at a large quarry there. Neither survey recorded any sites within 1 km of the project area.

Linear surveys were conducted along segments of Wetmore Road and adjacent Broadway Street west-southwest of the survey area in 1986 and along the Wurzbach Parkway corridor just north of it in 1991. The Atlas does not provide any other information about these projects. In 2005, personnel with South Texas Archeological Research Services, L.L.C., conducted a small survey at Salado Creek and Wetmore Road for Medina Consulting Company, Inc., and the Federal Communications Commission. No sites are depicted in this survey area. In the same year, the Center for Archaeological Research conducted an intensive pedestrian survey north of Wetmore Road on three tracts to be impacted by the planned airport expansion for the City of San Antonio Department of Aviation. No new archeological sites were documented in these tracts, but previously documented site 41BX959 was revisited. Site 41BX959, about 1.2 km northwest of the project area, is a multicomponent Archaic and late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century artifact scatter on a knoll east of Mud Creek that was initially recorded archeological steward C. K. Chandler in 1991. The prehistoric component consists of tested cobbles, debitage, bifaces, dart points, a Guadalupe tool, unifacial tools, cores, and occasional pieces of burned rock. The historic component is composed of glass, historic ceramics, plastic, rubber, and metal artifacts derived from a preexisting farmstead. Shovel testing conducted during the revisit expanded the site boundary and indicated that the majority of the prehistoric archeological deposit is within 10 cm of the modern surface, with a handful of artifacts recovered between 10 and 40 cm (Figueroa and Thompson 2005).

In 2007, personnel with SWCA Environmental Consultants conducted an intensive survey of the proposed Wurzbach Parkway extension corridor between Blanco Road and Wetmore Road for HNTB Corporation and the Texas Department of Transportation. No new archeological sites were identified (Galindo et al. 2010).

In 2008, the Center for Archaeological Research conducted an intensive archeological survey of the segment of the proposed Salado Creek Greenway between Loop 410 and Wetmore Road. This project identified three new prehistoric sites (all well outside the 1-km review area) and revisited 41BX841 about 1.1 km south-southeast of the current project area. This site was recorded as a surface artifact scatter. It covers ca. 300x280 m in Ladybird Johnson Park on the north side of Salado Creek. Three shovel tests were dug in the southwest portion; the one positive test contained burned rocks to a depth of 50 cm and lithic debitage to 60 cm (Figueroa 2008). The portion within the project right of way was determined to be ineligible for National Register inclusion in 2008.

Finally, in 2017, personnel with Horizon Environmental Services, Inc., conducted a survey of existing and proposed wastewater alignments along the south side of Wurzbach Parkway for the San Antonio Water System. This survey identified Native American site 41BX2168 about 0.6 km west-northwest of the project area. This site is an extensively disturbed, 105x20-m surface scatter of debitage and cores sandwiched between an infilled gravel quarry and Wurzbach Parkway right of way (Owens 2017). Site 41BX2168 was determined to be ineligible for National Register inclusion in 2017.

In addition to review of the Archeological Sites Atlas, the potential for historic archeological sites was assessed using a mid-eighteenth-century Spanish map, several nineteenth- and twentieth-century maps obtained from the Texas Department of Transportation's Texas Historic Overlay, and a series of historic and modern quadrangles and aerial photographs accessed through the NETR Online web viewer. Late-nineteenth-century Bexar County maps depict a northeast-southwest road in the vicinity of the project area (Klappenbach 1871) and a later alignment that probably relates to the International and Great Northern Railroad (Rullman 1887). These likely correspond to modern-day Wetmore Road and the railroad tracks along Wetmore Road just west of the project area. The railroad line that parallels Wurzbach Parkway just north of the project area probably corresponds with an International and Great Northern Railroad line depicted on the 1928 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Bracken quadrangle. The Longhorn Siding is depicted at the northeast corner of where these two rail lines merge on the 1928 quadrangle and on subsequent quadrangle maps (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1928, 1938; U.S. Defense Mapping Agency 1978; U.S. Geological Survey 1953, 1967, 1992). The north-south railroad is labeled as the Missouri Pacific Railroad, and the east-west line is labeled as the Missouri, Kansas, & Texas Railroad on the 1953 and 1967 USGS Longhorn quadrangle maps. No development is depicted within the project area on the majority of maps reviewed. However, the 1973 USGS Longhorn and 1978 U.S. Defense Mapping Agency Bracken quadrangles do indicate that an unimproved haul road once passed north-south through the survey area, connecting a quarrying operation north of present-day Wurzbach Parkway with a material dump south of the project area. The 1992 USGS Longhorn quadrangle also depicts an unimproved roadway along or just outside of the southwest edge of the project area. Review of available aerial imagery (NETR Online 2018) and Google Earth satellite imagery supports the conclusion that the project area was little impacted by the urban development that surrounded it in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. A 1955 aerial image indicates the survey area is in a large tract south of the railroad line that was once used for row-crop cultivation, and late-twentieth-century images suggest the east edge was impacted by disturbance associated with construction of Wurzbach Parkway.

The Atlas review suggested there is some potential for surface and near-surface prehistoric archeological deposits in the project area, particularly near the tributary that passes along the southeast side. However, geologic and geomorphic characteristics of the project area suggest that it has limited potential for deeply buried prehistoric archeological sites. Review of available nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century maps and aeriels suggests there is some minor potential for historic archeological sites associated with the construction and operation of nearby railroads and the operation of area quarries.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Field investigations consisted of pedestrian survey by a crew of two archeologists who walked transects across the 23.7-acre area at intervals of ca. 30 m, examined vegetation-free surface exposures and the creek cut bank, and excavated

21 shovel tests. The work meets or exceeds the requirements of the Texas Historical Commission’s Archeological Survey Standards for Texas. The project area consists of a 0.7-acre linear segment on the east-side of the creek that will be used to construct a road and bridge to access the ball fields and a 23.0-acre triangular area on the west side of the creek that will be the main part of the park (Figure 2). Investigations in these areas did not discover any prehistoric or historic archeological sites.

The access road segment supports a vegetative cover of grasses and mature huisache (sweet acacia) and hackberry trees. It is higher in elevation, ca. 740 ft above mean sea level, than the remainder of the project area and as such may be considered to have a greater potential for archeological sites. However, it is also

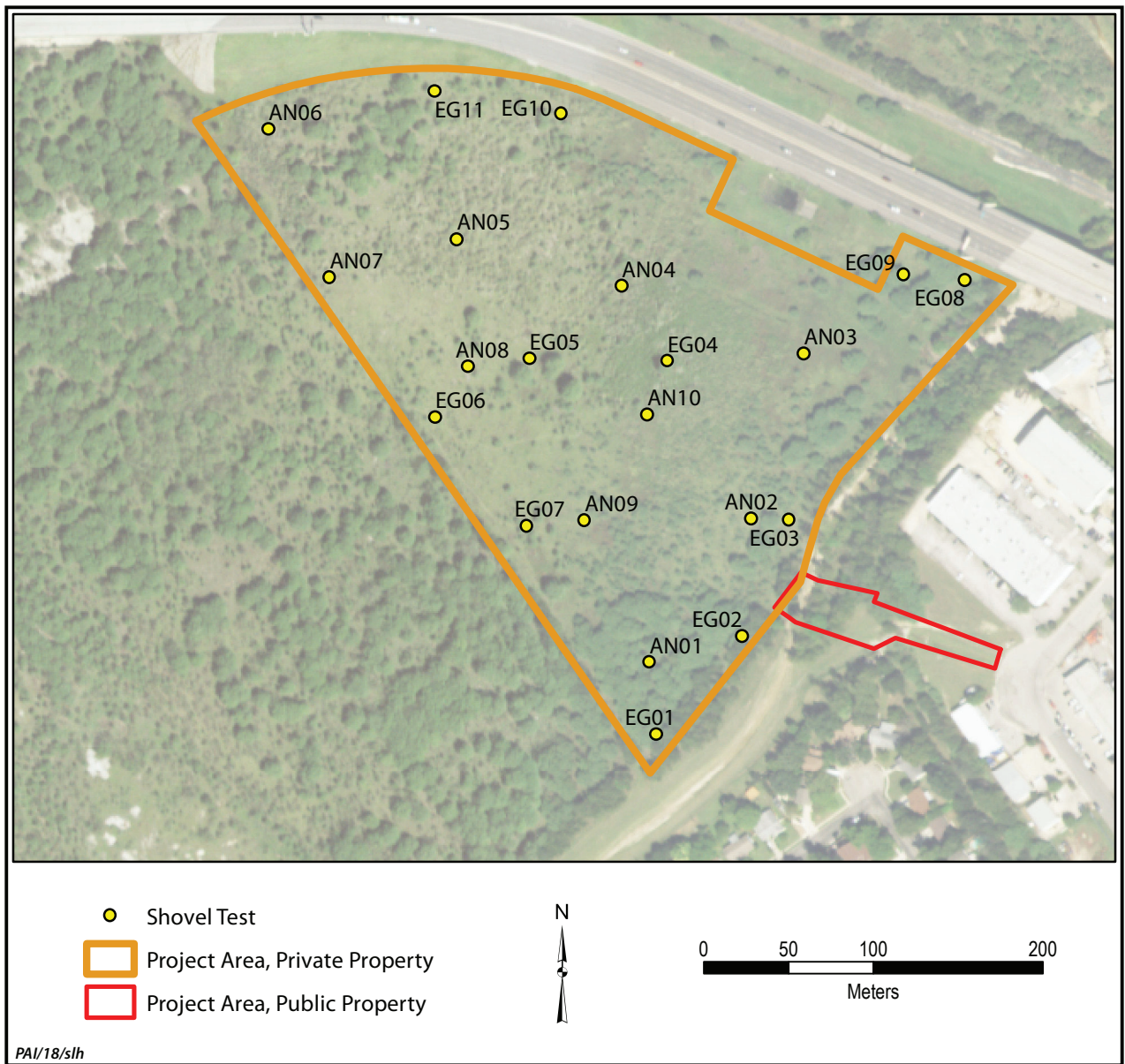


Figure 2. Modern aerial photograph of the project area showing shovel test locations.

substantially disturbed by utilities consisting of both sewer and overhead power lines, a concrete-lined drainage ditch to the creek, surface runoff channels, and bulldozer push piles (Figure 3). Most of these disturbances are likely associated with the extensive development along the east side of the creek, which consists of an industrial complex and residential neighborhoods. Surface exposures near the creek were inspected in this area, but no shovel tests were excavated because of the disturbance.

The 23.0-acre main part of the project area, located west of the creek at an elevation of 730 ft, is lower than the east bank of the creek. It supports similar vegetation of mature huisache and hackberry trees concentrated mainly along the creek, with scattered trees, tall grasses, and dense stands of brush across the area away from the creek. Ground surface visibility is generally low in this area, but it can rise to 30 to 60 percent under some of the stands of brush (Figure 4a). The lack of vegetation below these brushy sections may be a result of water perching on the clayey soils after heavy rains, and ponded water is present along the southwest project area boundary. Disturbances in the area consist of evidence of scooped-out sections and bulldozer piles along the northeastern side between Shovel Tests AN03 and AN04 as well as on the northwest side between Shovel Tests AN07 and EG06 (Figure 4b). The northeastern boundary was affected by the construction of embankments associated with Wurzbach Parkway just to the north. Shovel Test EG08 in this area exposed disturbed sediment, and chert gravels, probably from road construction, were noted on the surface at Shovel Tests EG10 and EG11. There is also a grass-covered two-track road with deep ruts paralleling the creek at the southeastern boundary. The fist-sized chert cobbles seen on the surface near Shovel Tests EG01 and EG02 likely came from this road; none of them were chipped in any way to suggest modifications by Native Americans.

Due to the limited surface visibility in the main part of the project area, shovel testing was done here. Shovel tests were placed judgmentally or at 100-m intervals along the transects. The shovel tests were approximately 30 cm in diameter and were excavated in 20-cm levels when sediments allowed. Excavated sediment was screened through 1/4-inch-mesh hardware cloth or carefully sorted through with a trowel when too difficult to screen efficiently. A Shovel Test Record form was used to record brief sediment descriptions and notes on recovery, natural inclusions, and characteristics such as the vegetation surrounding the tests. The average shovel test depth was 20 cm, with depths ranging from 10 to 40 cm.

Sediments within the shovel tests generally consisted of 10–40 cm of dark brown to dark grayish brown silty clay loam over dark brown clay loam. In Shovel Test EG08, light gray clay with yellow mottles was encountered at 10 cm below the surface; this may represent bedrock disturbed by construction of nearby Wurzbach Parkway. Chert cobbles were noted on the surface and in the silty clay loam, but none of these displayed chipping consistent with Native American tool production. No artifacts were recovered or noted in any of the tests or on the surface. Shovel tests were terminated as the silty clay loam transitioned to dense clay loam. Cut banks along the creek at the east edge of the project area indicate that the surface sediments can be up to ca. 1 m thick atop bedrock (Figure 5), but shovel tests show



a



b

Figure 3. Photographs of the access road segment of the project area: (a) Archeologist Aaron Norment standing on a bulldozer push pile at the northwest edge of the access road segment; (b) view to the northeast, with creek channel on the left and concrete-lined drainage ditch on the right.



a



b

Figure 4. Photographs of the main part of the project area: (a) Shovel Test EG04 with open ground below a brushy area; (b) view east across a grass-covered push pile from Shovel Test AN07.

that they are thinner away from the creek. The thickness of the sediments near the creek indicates some potential for buried sites there, but none were found in the extensive cut bank exposures examined.



Figure 5. View to the southwest of the creek cut bank northeast of Shovel Test EG03.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No prehistoric or historic artifacts or archeological sites were identified within the proposed Capitol Parks Little League ball fields project area during this survey. The access bridge and road section has seen extensive disturbance from development along the eastern creek bank, and the main western section of the proposed park has seen disturbance associated with land clearing and road construction. Shovel testing and examination of cut banks in this western section found no evidence of archeological sites. Hence, the proposed project will not impact any archeological resources that meet eligibility criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a State Antiquities Landmark. Prewitt and Associates, Inc., recommends that the proposed project be allowed to proceed without additional archeological investigations.

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