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Plan for Mitigation of Archaeological Sites San Antonio 201 Wastewater Treatment Project

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PLAN FOR MITIGATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES
SAN ANTONIO
201 WASTEWATER TREATMENT PROJECT

Anne A. Fox

Center for Archaeological Research
The University of Texas at San Antonio
Archaeological Survey Report, No. 75

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INTRODUCTION

Since December 1976, the Center for Archaeological Research has carried out a succession of archaeological surveys of proposed sewer line routes and sewage treatment plant construction in the San Antonio area (Fox 1977; Fox, McGraw and Valdez 1978). The data recovered, archaeological sites recorded and recommendations for future work have been provided to Radian Corporation for use in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement.

The engineers have published the 201 Wastewater Facility Plan (Pape-Dawson *et al.* 1978). It is now appropriate to examine this plan in relation to the archaeological work already completed, in order to assess what must yet be done to conserve archaeological resources wherever possible, and what mitigation will be necessary where sites will be threatened with damage or destruction.

After working on this project for two years, some observations can be made about the problems inherent in planning archaeological surveys for a sewage collection system (or for any type of utilities system) for a dynamic municipality such as San Antonio. Unfortunately for our purposes, population growth and real estate development are not entirely predictable in location or extent. Plans made in December are often out of date by January and overrun by May. Therefore, planning and archaeological survey must be flexible and cover as many eventualities as practical and possible. Cooperation and communication between planners, engineers, city personnel and archaeologists must be maintained on a constant basis in order to keep abreast of changes in routing and funding. These changes must of necessity occur frequently to meet current problems and changing priorities.

PRESENT PROCEDURES

For the above reasons, the following procedures are presently being followed:

1. All sewer line routes which are predicted by the 201 Wastewater Facility Plan to be utilized within Period A, that is before 1983, have been surveyed by archaeological teams, and the archaeological sites which warrant further testing and/or inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places have been determined, as mentioned above.
2. ~~The areas immediately surrounding the present sewage treatment plants and the proposed new plant at the confluence of the San Antonio and Medina Rivers have been surveyed and significant sites located. Transfer and interceptor lines to the new plant have also been surveyed.~~
3. After consulting with the City Sewer Engineer on the current rate of sewer service expansion, several additional areas which have recently been changed from Period B (1983 to 2000) to Period A status, or appear that they may be changed in the near future, are now being surveyed by archaeological teams. The resulting data will be compiled as in the previous surveys and circulated as an addendum to the original archaeological survey report.

4. By regular attendance at Wastewater Advisory Committee meetings and consultations with the City Sewer Engineer and the Special Project Engineer, the Center has been kept informed of current changes in plans for routing of new sewer lines and changes in estimated dates for construction.

ARCHAEOLOGY DURING STEP 2

The role of the Center during the Step 2 design phase will be as advisor to the design engineers on archaeological problems which are likely to be encountered on each individual line. Input will be provided based on sites located during the survey phase of the project, plus experience gained from archaeological excavations at nearby sites in the area.

The goal will be to avoid archaeological sites entirely. If for some reason this is impossible, archaeological testing and excavation will be necessary. Testing will be utilized to determine relative significance of sites where choices must be made in sewer line routing. At each site due to be seriously damaged or eliminated by sewer line construction, a two-phase program will be carried out. This will consist of preliminary testing to determine size, depth and content, then carefully planned excavation to recover as much information as possible.

A program of deep machine trenching will be necessary at the Confluence site (41 BX 124) after the property is acquired by the City of San Antonio, in order to establish the limits and depth of the site. Only after the results of such testing are analyzed will it be possible to design a program of mitigation for the site in advance of construction of the treatment plant.

A full report on the testing and mitigation described above will be published by the Center when the Step 2 design phase is finished.

ARCHAEOLOGY DURING STEP 3

Hopefully, the work of protecting or mitigating archaeological sites will essentially be finished at the end of the Step 2 design process. However, there are a few areas, particularly in the southern part of the county, where it will be important for an archaeologist to monitor the pipeline excavations because of the possibility of buried sites in alluvial areas (Fox 1977:17) and in cultivated fields where the extent of a site could not be determined from surface examination (Fox, McGraw and Valdez 1978:11).

Plans are also under discussion for a short training course for city construction inspectors and engineering field crews in recognizing and reporting historic sites. This should prove helpful in locating and preserving new sites as they are found during the project. Center archaeologists will be on call for consultation should any additional prehistoric or historic sites be located by pipeline construction crews. In this way it should be possible to quickly assess a newly uncovered site, determine its relative importance and recover as much as possible without appreciably delaying the construction project.

CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the helpful and cooperative attitude shown by all the participants in this project, the work of locating and assessing archaeological sites has proceeded smoothly. Contrary to the original plans, it has not been feasible to conduct test excavations in sites recommended for testing during the first phase of the project. This has been due to a number of factors, among them the reluctance of the Bexar County landowners to have their property disturbed and the reluctance of the archaeologists and landowners to call attention to sites which may never be bothered in the future. Therefore, we have recommended that testing be done only where necessary for evaluation during the Step 2 designing process. In this way, attention will be called only to those sites which are directly endangered by the project; the others will remain unknown to local collectors and vandals for as long as possible.

We feel that the experience we have gained in dealing with the people and agencies involved in the 201 Wastewater Facilities Project has been invaluable both for our employees and as a precedent for others attempting to do this sort of project. On the whole we have found landowners cooperative and helpful in telling us about sites and artifact collections. The spirit of cooperation we have found in every meeting with project participants and with the Advisory Committee has been most encouraging for the future of archaeological research and conservation in San Antonio.

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