



**Intensive Survey Associated with Improvements  
to the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center,  
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas**

*by*

Jennifer L. Thompson

Texas Antiquities Permit No. 5952



*Prepared for:*  
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Center for Archaeological Research  
The University of Texas at San Antonio  
One UTSA Circle  
San Antonio, Texas, 78249  
Technical Report No. 33

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**Abstract:**

Marmon Mok Architecture contracted with the Center for Archaeological Research at The University of Texas at San Antonio (CAR-UTSA) to perform an intensive archaeological survey of backhoe trenches (BHT) on the remaining undeveloped portions of Lot 12, Block 3, NCB 13814 in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, to assess the impact of the proposed construction on an *acequia* lateral projected to run through the lot. The Area of Potential Effect (APE) is on the remaining lot east of the Grand Hyatt Hotel and north of the Convention Center Exhibit Hall "D" in a grassy area near the intersection of Market and Bowie Streets. The lot is scheduled for development as an outdoor event space with landscaping, masonry retaining walls, restrooms, and drinking fountains. The greatest impact to the project area will be the removal of 1 m (3 ft.) of soil to stabilize the ground surface for construction. Numerous utilities cross the project area, many witnessed in backhoe trench walls. Four backhoe trenches were excavated and two construction trenches were examined on June 1, 2011. No cultural materials or remnants of the *acequia* were observed in any of the trenches. The archaeological trenches were excavated to 1.5 m (5 ft.) below the surface. The two existing construction trenches that were excavated to 0.9 m (3 ft.) below the surface by SpawGlass Construction Company were also examined by CAR. Jennifer Thompson served as Project Archaeologist. Dr. Steve Tomka served as the Principal Investigator. The project was conducted under Texas Antiquities Committee (TAC) Permit No. 5952.

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## **Acknowledgments:**

The author would like to thank all those involved in the completion of this archaeological survey. Dirk Sincler assisted with field monitoring and drawing profiles of backhoe trenches. Rick Young and Bruce Moses assisted with drafting of figures and field maps for project planning and reporting. Marybeth Tomka served as Lab Supervisor and coordinated all curation associated with the project.

Rick and Lawrence Cavaness of Alamo Backhoe Services provided the machinery and operators necessary to complete this project.

Finally, Brian Jonas of SpawGlass Construction Company coordinated our field work at the job site and provided helpful details about the planned construction and known utilities (of which there were many) within the project area.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

Marmon Marmon Mok Architecture contracted with the Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Texas at San Antonio (CAR-UTSA) to perform an intensive archaeological survey of remaining undeveloped portions of Lot 12, Block 3, NCB 13814 in San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas. The City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation (SAOHP) requested the intensive survey with backhoe trenching to identify and document portions of an *acequia* that may be present. The project falls under the jurisdiction of the City Preservation Ordinance (Article VI, Historic Preservation and Urban Design, City of San Antonio, Unified Development Code). In addition, because the project activities impact City-owned land, the improvement-related activities also fall under the jurisdiction of the Antiquities Code of Texas. Therefore, cultural resources management-related coordination on this project included both the Texas Historical Commission and the Office of Historic Preservation.

Figure 1-1 shows the location of the Convention Center Area of Potential Effect (APE), or project area, on the 7.5-minute *San Antonio East* USGS quadrangle map. Figure 1-2 shows the APE in a recent aerial photograph. The project area is on the remaining



Figure 1-1. The location of the Convention Center Area of Potential Effect (APE), or project area, on the 7.5-minute San Antonio East USGS quadrangle map.



Figure 1-2. Aerial photograph showing the location of the Convention Center APE.

lot east of the Grand Hyatt Hotel and north of the Convention Center Exhibit Hall “D” in a grassy area near the intersection of Market and Bowie Streets. A few small trees and a fire lane were present at the time of survey (Figure 1-3 and Figure 1-4). The survey was conducted on June 1, 2011. Jennifer Thompson served as Project Archaeologist. Dr. Steve Tomka served as the Principal Investigator. The project was conducted under Texas Antiquities Committee (TAC) Permit No. 5952.

The proposed development includes landscaping and hardscaping with textured concrete, cobblestone, stone walls, and benches. Light poles, drinking fountains, and restrooms will also be installed. Some existing trees will be transplanted (Figure 1-5). All of the project area, except the fire lane, will be graded to 0.9 m (3 ft.) below the ground surface and refilled to stabilize the ground for construction.

The project area has seen significant impacts including installation of utilities associated with the Convention Center and a change in the route of Bowie Street. The old and new routes of Bowie Street are shown in Figures 1-1 and 1-2.





Figure 1-3. Overview of the APE looking southeast toward the Convention Center. Stakes mark a buried water line.



Figure 1-4. Overview of the APE looking southeast toward the Convention Center. Stakes mark buried electric lines.

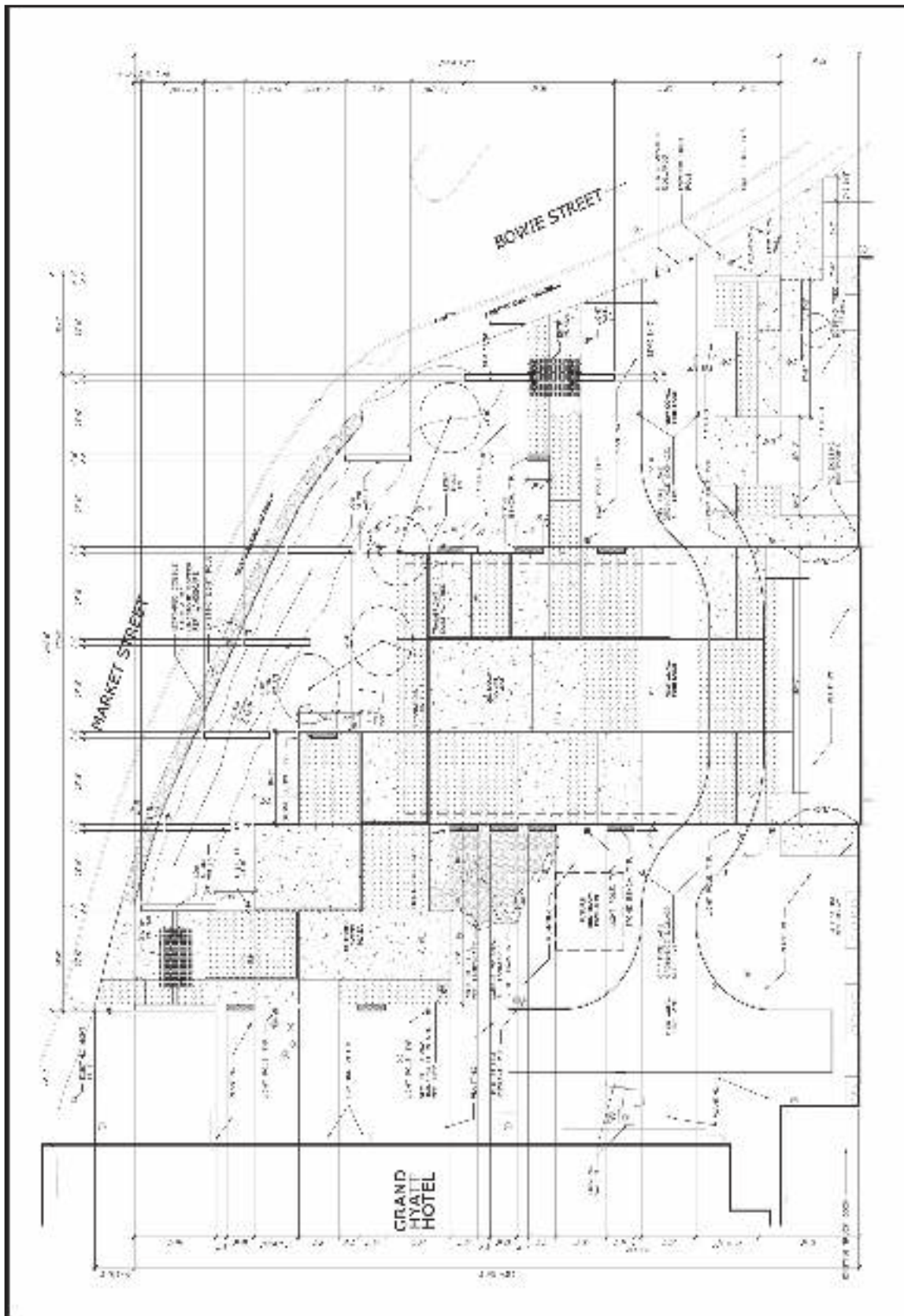


Figure 1-5. Event Plaza Plan.



## Chapter 2: Historical Setting

Though the land was inhabited by American Indians thousands of years prior to the colonization of Texas, the Historic Period is the focus of these archaeological investigations. Much of the information in this chapter draws from previous studies conducted in the area by Johnson and Cox (1995), Johnson et al. (1997), and Fox and Cox (1990).

### The *Acequia Madre*

The impetus for conducting the intensive archaeological survey is the possible presence of the *Acequia Madre* and one of its lateral branches in the project area. The term *Madre* is used here to define the principal irrigation channel from which lateral channels branched. The *Acequia Madre* was part of a large Colonial irrigation network of canals and dams that channeled water from the San Antonio River throughout the city and out to missions and ranches. While the original channels were constructed to irrigate the mission ranches, additional lateral branches were added to the main channels to serve the public. Parts of the ditch-crossing developed areas were stone lined in the mid-nineteenth century (Cox 1985).

The *Acequia Madre* was built and modified between 1718 and 1744 as an open, unlined ditch to carry water from the San Antonio River to the fields of Mission San Antonio de Valero (the Alamo). It left the river in Brackenridge Park through a diversion dam located just north of the Witte Museum compound. This dam raised the water level and directed water flow to the east bank where the channel intake was located. The *acequia* then ran east of Mission San Antonio de Valero and divided into east and west branches that headed south through the lower mission fields. The *acequia* then rejoined the San Antonio River in the King William area, which brought its total length to 5.6 km (3.5 mi.) (Fox and Cox 1990 and Johnson et al. 1997). As the missions grew, the *acequias* were expanded to the east and eventually reached approximately 16 km (10 mi.) in length.



Figure 2-1. *Acequias near the project area.*

The eastern branch of the principal channel ran northeast/southwest through the present-day Convention Center grounds, just west of the current project area (Figure 2-1). Historical maps of the *acequia* network show a lateral ditch trending southeast off the *Acequia Madre* and passing through or very near the north end of the project area that was in use by the mid-1840s. Figure 2-1 shows one version of the *acequia* system in a modern aerial photograph. On this version, the lateral ditch falls outside the project area. This lateral ditch is likely the same ditch described in Bexar County Deed Records as the northern boundary of an 1848 community known as Beckville. Alternatively, historic records (see below) suggest that the northern boundary of Beckville, and therefore the *acequia*, fell within the project area.

The western branch of the *Acequia Madre* ceased carrying water at the turn of the twentieth century. The eastern branch was closed in 1916 (Cox and Fox 1983:15). This prevented the ditches from collecting rain water and trash, which had become a public health hazard. Ditch closures were accomplished by dumping household trash in the *acequias* by residents (Fox and Cox 1990). *Acequia* deposits excavated around the city show unstratified deposits of early twentieth-century trash suggesting that the *acequias* were filled rapidly (Frkuska 1981, Cox 1985, Fox et al. 1989).





of the City of San Antonio, drawn by Augustus Koch in 1873, shows standing structures on all lots as does the 1896 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* (Figure 2-4 and Figure 2-5).

### North of Beckville

North of Beckville was a tract owned by José de los Santos Hernandes that was passed to his son Geraldo Hernandes. This *suerte* was bounded to the north by Alameda Avenue (E. Commerce Street), to the west by Water Street and the *Acequia Madre*, and to the east by Third (Indianola) Street. The small lateral irrigation ditch that defined the northern boundary of Beckville marked the southern limits of the Hernandes *suerte* (Figure 2-3; Johnson et al. 1997; BCDR S1:355).

This land remained undeveloped and unsurveyed for ten years after the Beckville survey. Geraldo Hernandes sold the property to Victor Considerant and Anthony Superville in May 1858. The city surveyor, Victor Cousins, then assessed the land and divided it into lots for Considerant and Superville later that year. Augustus Morrisset bought the right and title from Superville in January 1864 (BCDR T1:152). The following May, Angel C. Torres bought the land (BCDR T2:337).

The tract became part of Block A (CB 687) and Block B (CB 686). Block A included CB 687 and 374. Block B included CB 686 and 873 (see Figure 2-3). The current project area falls almost entirely within Block B, which was bounded on the north by Lafite Street. Koch's drawing shows that all the lots on Block B were



Figure 2-4. *Bird's Eye View of San Antonio*, drawn by Augustus Koch in 1873, looking south.

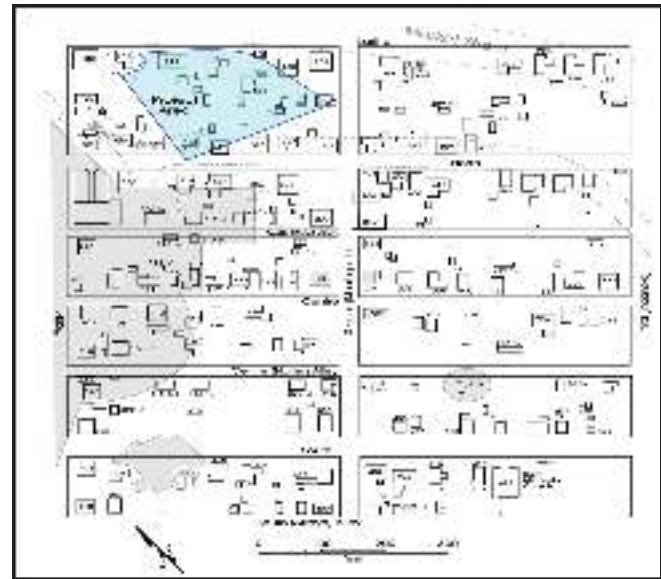


Figure 2-5. 1896 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing structures present within the project area.

developed by 1873. Block A was slower to develop and does not show standing structures until 1896. The north side of Block A on CB 687 eventually housed the Patrick Public School Number 5 which later became Burnet Public School (Johnson et al. 1997) (Figure 2-5).

The dates of the survey and land transactions in the Beckville tracts and north suggest that there were few structures prior to 1850. The majority of the structures in the area were built between 1850 and 1875.

Fox and Cox (1990) report that the area remained largely undeveloped until the 1870s. Many large homes were built in the area in the late nineteenth century by notable businessmen along Water Street and Goliad Street. The neighborhood included people of all races and churches of many denominations. Into the twentieth century, however, many of the homes were converted for commercial use or rental properties.

In the 1960s, the City of San Antonio began planning for HemisFair 1968 (Cox and Fox 1983), which was a world's fair hosted in the City from April 6 to October 6, 1968. The fair was constructed on approximately 100 acres in historic downtown San Antonio with the

Tower of the Americas as a focal point. The project was considered an urban renewal project, and many of the historic structures there were demolished. Only a few of the 129 structures recommended for preservation by the San Antonio Conservation Society were incorporated into the fairgrounds (Johnson and Cox 1995).

### Plotting the Route of the *Acequia*

The layout and names of the Beckville streets have changed, but projections of the original neighborhood layout aided the relocation effort and approximate date of the acequia lateral. Historic maps of the Beckville survey were overlain on modern maps and then compared to other plots of the *acequia*. Figure 2-6 shows an overlay of the Beckville neighborhood with the *acequia* location plotted as the northern boundary of the neighborhood. The second projection of the *acequia* (dotted line) is based on digitized data of the *acequias* on file at CAR.

### Previous Archaeological Investigations

At least three archaeological projects have been conducted for construction related to the Convention Center and its expansion (Johnson et al. 1997; Tennis and Cox 1998; Ulrich 2007). Johnson et al. (1997) performed an archival study for the Convention Center expansion. Part I of the Johnson et al. (1997) report presents an overall history of the City of San Antonio. Part II provides archival research specific to



Figure 2-6. Projections of the acequia locations plotted with the Beckville neighborhood and modern aerial photograph. The solid line shows the acequia as described in the boundary information for the Beckville survey. The dotted line is based on other historic maps on file at CAR.



Figure 2-7. Previous archaeological work near the project area.

HemisFair Park and archaeological work in the area near the current project area. Other archival studies include information on historic standing structures in HemisFair Park (Johnson and Cox 1995). These reports include investigations of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century neighborhoods. They conclude that the construction of HemisFair Park in the mid-1960s did destroy many historic structure foundations but that filling and berming performed for landscaping the area may have preserved many historic deposits.

In 1997, CAR conducted archaeological investigations in association with water and sewer lines for the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center Expansion Project (Tennis and Cox 1997). The southern portion of the utility lines ran through portions of NCB 689, 693, and 696. The northern route of the utility lines crossed through or near the current project area in NCB 686, 687, 873, and 874 (Figure 2-7).

Finally in 2005-2006, CAR monitored construction of the Hyatt Convention Center Hotel (Ulrich 2007:Figure 2-7). Five late nineteenth-century features were identified, recorded, and then removed. All features were remnants of foundations except one historic trash deposit.

Other significant archaeological resources are also documented within the Convention Center grounds and HemisFair Park, including several historic structures. The project area is also within a mile of Mission San Antonio de Valero (41BX6) and La Villita Earthworks (41BX677), both listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

## Chapter 3: Field and Laboratory Methodology

Generally, any site or feature older than 50 years is considered historic and its significance determined according to NRHP criteria. However, the Texas Historic Commission (THC) has defined archaeologically significant resources for this area of San Antonio as intact deposits pre-dating 1850 or any features of unique nature post-dating 1850. Given the level of construction activities that have occurred during recent years in the vicinity of the APE, it was anticipated that most architectural remains such as historic residences and structures would no longer exist.

### Field Methodology

CAR investigated portions of the APE that were likely to contain the *acequia* by excavating four backhoe trenches (BHTs) across to the expected route of the *acequia* lateral to search for its location while also avoiding utilities. Because the project foreman assured CAR that the depth of impact to the project area was only three feet, CAR limited the excavations to 1.5 m (5 ft.) below the surface. Trench length varied to avoid marked utilities, other open trenches, and the fire lane. All trenches were approximately 130 cm (51 in.) wide.

Both walls of each trench were examined for the presence of cultural materials, features, and the *acequia*.

Representative portions from one wall of three of the four trenches were selected and profiled. No artifacts were collected. The location of each trench was recorded with a Trimble Geo XT GPS. Photographs were taken of each trench wall and the project area.

### Laboratory Methodology

All records obtained and generated during the project were prepared for curation in accordance with federal regulation 36 CFR part 79, and THC requirements for State Held-in-Trust collections. Additionally, the materials were curated in accordance with current guidelines of the CAR. Field notes, forms, photographs, and drawings were placed in labeled archival folders. Digital photographs were printed on acid-free paper, labeled with archival-appropriate materials, and placed in archival-quality sleeves. All field forms were completed with pencil. Soiled forms were placed in archival-quality page protectors. Ink-jet produced maps and illustrations also were placed in archival-quality page protectors to prevent accidental smearing due to moisture. All project related documentation is permanently housed at the CAR.



## Chapter 4: Survey Results

The intensive survey included excavation of four backhoe trenches (BHT) and examination of two existing trenches opened in the project area by SpawGlass Construction Company (Figure 4-1). Two utility locate services reported over 100 utility lines within the project area, but the exact location of all could not be marked at the surface. Some gas, electric, sewer, and several water lines were marked with paint, but most others were not. Due to the numerous reported utilities in the project area, SpawGlass excavated exploratory trenches to 1 m

(3 ft.) below the surface to locate utilities that could not be marked or mapped. Many utilities uncovered by the SpawGlass trenches were no longer in service and were undocumented. SpawGlass Trench 1 was approximately 27 m (90 ft.) long and ran north/south (Figure 4-2). It transected a projected route of the *acequia* lateral but did not expose the *acequia*. SpawGlass Trench 2 was approximately 23 m (75 ft.) long and ran east/west, intersecting the first trench (Figure 4-3). Both trenches exposed numerous utilities and fill.



Figure 4-1. Location of backhoe trenches within the project area.



Figure 4-2. SpawGlass Trench 1. Note utilities exposed in walls.



Figure 4-3. SpawGlass Trench 2. Note utilities exposed in walls.

BHTs 1-4 excavated by CAR exposed the same deposits, various utilities, and utility trenches as the SpawGlass trenches (Figures 4-4 and 4-5). All trenches were excavated to 1.5 m (5 ft.) below surface or to the depth of a utility. BHT 1 was 6 m (20 ft.) long, 1.3 m (4.2 ft.) wide, and 1.4 m (4.6 ft.) deep. BHT 2 was 5 m (16.4 ft.) long, 1.3 m (4.2 ft.) wide, and 1.7 m (5.5 ft.) deep. BHT 3 was 3 m (9.8 ft.) long, 1.3 m (4.2 ft.) wide, and 1.65 m (5.4 ft.) deep. BHT

4 was 6.2 m (20.3 ft.) long, 1.3 m (4.2 ft.) wide, and 1.05 m (3.4 ft.) deep. Trenches were placed between marked utilities in areas along the projected northern boundary of the historic Beckville neighborhood that was bounded on the north by the *acequia* lateral. The *acequia* lateral was not exposed in any of the four backhoe trenches excavated by CAR. No cultural materials or intact soils were observed in any of the trench walls up to 1.5 m (5 ft.) below the surface.



Figure 4-4. Trench 1, west wall.



Figure 4-5. Trench 3, west wall.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

Though the APE was in an historic area of San Antonio, no remnants of the *acequia* lateral or the mid-nineteenth-century neighborhood, known as Beckville, were uncovered. The field archaeologists observed only fill and buried utilities in the four backhoe trenches excavated by CAR and the two

trenches excavated by the construction sub-contractor SpawGlass Construction Company. No artifacts were collected during this project. All documents associated with this project are curated at CAR-UTSA. CAR recommends no further work within the proposed impact area.

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