

**ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES FILE SEARCH  
AND LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE SKYPLACE BOULEVARD EXTENSION  
PROJECT, SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR COUNTY, TEXAS  
WBS Element: 40-00043-04-02  
Environmental Project Code: 09-551C5-411CIP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In April 2012, Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an archeological survey and historical resources file search and literature review for the proposed extension of Skyplace Boulevard immediately north of the San Antonio International Airport in San Antonio, Texas. The project area, approximately 7.9 acres of unimproved land, consists of uplands and the adjoining floodplain of Salado Creek. Most of the upland portion of the project area has been disturbed by activities relating to airport and road construction, though one pre-historic procurement site and lithic scatter (41BX1927) was recorded there. Site 41BX1927 is disturbed and does not contain subsurface deposits, and it is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a State Archeological Landmark. The entire project area within the floodplain is covered with construction-related debris piles. While it is possible that archeological remains could lie buried in creekside alluvium below the construction debris, any such remains would not be impacted by the proposed project since the only activity in this area will be filling to create an embankment for the road. No further archeological work is recommended for the Skyplace Boulevard extension project area. The project area does not contain any historical resources; as long as the project remains a nonfederal undertaking, no further work to document historical resources on adjoining lands will be necessary; if that changes, reconnaissance survey would be recommended.

## **CURATION**

No artifacts needing curation were collected during the archeological survey. Project records and photographs will be kept on file at Prewitt and Associates, Inc.

## **INTRODUCTION**

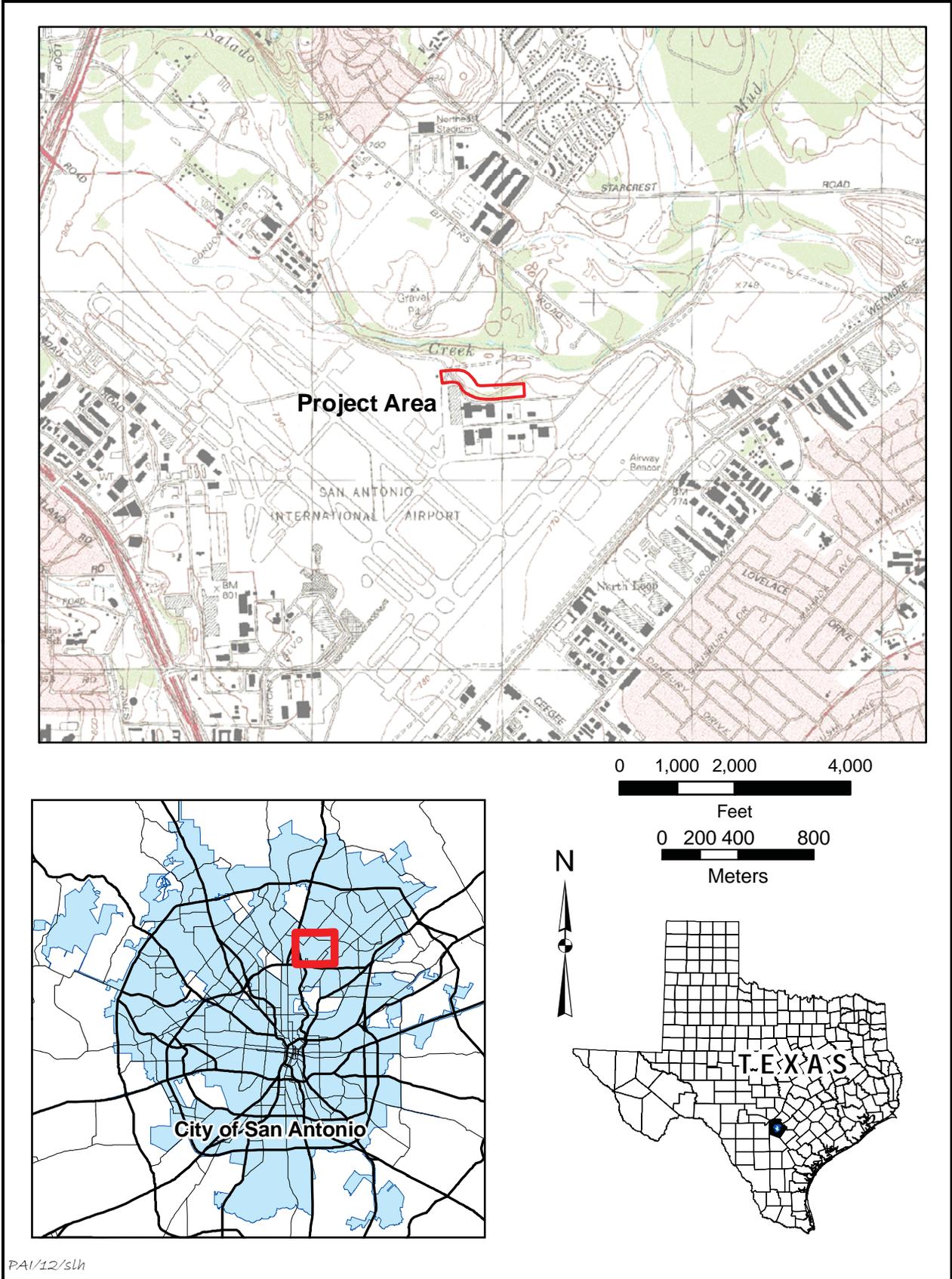
In April 2012, personnel from Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted an archeological survey and historical resources file search and literature review for the proposed extension of Skyplace Boulevard immediately north of the San Antonio International Airport in San Antonio, Texas (Figure 1). The project will consist of construction of about 1,680 ft of 50-ft-wide roadway. The proposed road will have two 15-ft travel lanes and two 10-ft shoulders. The greater part of the roadway will be constructed on fill approximately 25 ft thick that will extend onto the 100-year floodplain of Salado Creek. With a 3:1 slope, the fill will extend 75 ft north of the roadway, and there will be a 30-ft-wide easement north of the fill. Drainage improvements and other construction-related impacts will extend about 50 ft south of the roadway. With a typical total width of about 205 ft and a total length of 1,680 ft, the horizontal Area of Potential Effects will be 7.9 acres. The vertical Area of Potential Effects generally will be 3 ft or less, with subsurface impacts restricted to the southern part of the project area on the margin of the Salado Creek valley. Only shallow surface impacts associated with placement of the fill embankment are anticipated on the floodplain of Salado Creek.

The study area for the archeological survey consists of approximately 7.9 acres of unimproved land immediately north of the San Antonio International Airport. The archeological survey was authorized by the State of Texas Antiquities Code (Texas Natural Resource Code of 1977, Title 9, Chapter 191, VTCS 6145-9) and conducted under Texas Antiquities Permit No. 6182. The work was also conducted under the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation and Design Section of the Unified Development Code (Article 6 35-360–634), Office of Historic Preservation.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING**

Bexar County is in south-central Texas and straddles the Balcones Fault Zone, which separates the Edwards Plateau from the Blackland Prairie of the Gulf Coastal Plain to the southeast (Arbingast et al. 1973:6; Bureau of Economic Geology 1983). The Edwards Plateau margin has been heavily dissected by stream downcutting and headward erosion, resulting in a rugged landscape of limestone hills and canyons, whereas the Blackland Prairie is typically rolling tall grasslands underlain by soft limestones, marls, and chalks.

The climate of the Blackland Prairie region can be classified as modified humid subtropical with Gulf-influenced hot summers and continental-influenced mild winters; the Edwards Plateau region is subtropical steppe with low summer humidity (Natural Fibers Information Center 1987:10–12). Summer temperatures can exceed 100°F, and freezing temperatures can occur during the winter months, although such extremes are more frequent in the Edwards Plateau region. The mean annual precipitation for Bexar County is 29.1 inches (739 mm). Rain falls throughout the year, with slight peaks in the late spring and early fall months (Natural Fibers Information Center 1987:49).



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**Figure 1.** Project location map.

Like the landscape and climate, the biota of Bexar County differs east to west, although there is geographical overlap of some species. The flora and fauna of the Edwards Plateau are defined as Balconian, while those of the Blackland Prairie are characterized as Texan (Blair 1950).

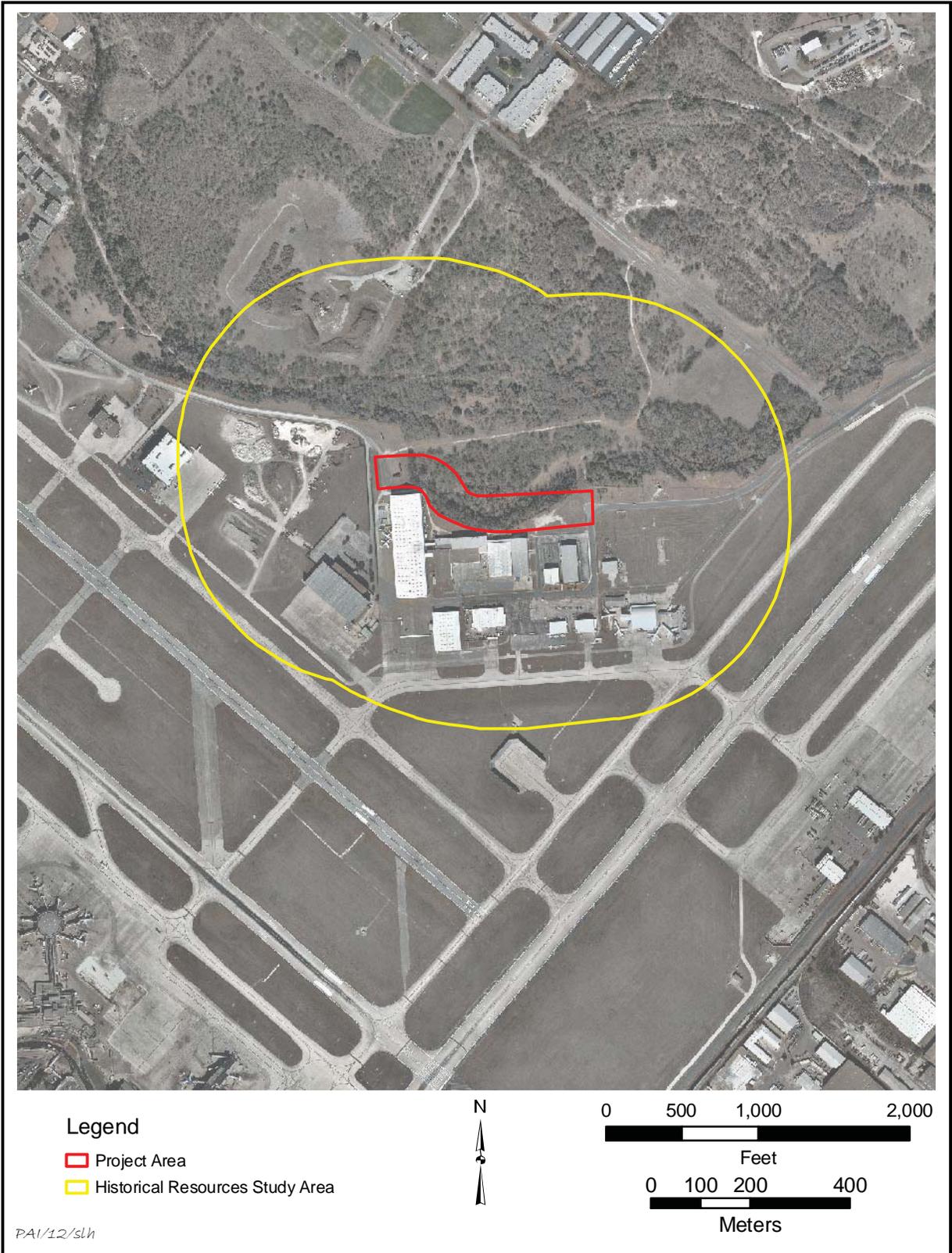
The project area is on the immediate south side of the Salado Creek valley. Holocene fluvial terrace deposits are mapped on the floodplain of Salado Creek along the north edge of the project area, while most of the area to be impacted is mapped as the Pleistocene Leona Formation (Bureau of Economic Geology 1983). Trinity and Frio soils are mapped on the floodplain, and Lewisville silty clay soils are mapped on the uplands to the south (Taylor et al. 1991). Buried archeological remains are possible on the floodplain, but based on geology and soils, any sites in parts of the project area where subsurface impacts are anticipated should be shallowly buried at most. Recent aerial photographs show that much of the project area is undeveloped and wooded, but some of it, particularly along the south side, was modified during construction of the airport immediately to the south.

## **RESULTS OF THE ARCHEOLOGICAL FILE SEARCH**

The Texas Historical Commission's Archeological Sites Atlas shows that there are no recorded sites within 1 km of the project area. The closest site, 41BX949, is 1.04 km to the northeast. It is a lithic scatter with a possible burned rock midden on a terrace north of Salado Creek; it was recorded in 1991 by personnel with the State Department of Highways and Public Transportation. The sites atlas shows that a number of archeological surveys have been done in the vicinity of the project area, with the closest one being 0.3–0.7 km to the north. Prior to fieldwork, the project area was considered to have a moderate to high potential for Native American archeological sites based on its setting near Salado Creek. It was judged to have a low potential for historic archeological sites, since historic maps presented in the Texas Department of Transportation's Texas Historic Overlay indicated no improvements in the immediate area, and the earliest aerial photograph examined (1939) shows all of it in and surrounded by agricultural fields with no structures or other evident improvements.

## **RESULTS OF THE HISTORICAL RESOURCES FILE SEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

The file search for historical resources took into consideration known resources within a 1,300-ft study area of the proposed improvements (Figure 2). Information was gathered from the Texas Historical Commission's Texas Historic Sites Atlas concerning National Historic Landmarks; National Register of Historic Places properties; Official Texas Historical Markers (Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks, and subject, grave, and Texas Centennial markers); State Archeological Landmarks; and cemetery, neighborhood, and museum surveys. The National Park Service's Historic American Buildings Survey and



**Figure 2.** Modern aerial photograph showing historical resources study area.

Historic American Engineering Record were consulted, as was the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation's list of individual local landmarks. The San Antonio Conservation Society and the Bexar County Historical Commission were consulted for their knowledge of historic properties in the study area. The file search revealed that no resources in the study area have National Historic Landmark, National Register, Official Texas Historical Marker (of any kind), State Archeological Landmark, or local landmark designation. No resources have been documented as part of cemetery, neighborhood, or museum surveys, or as part of the Historic American Building Survey or Historic American Engineering Record. The San Antonio Conservation Society and the Bexar County Historical Commission indicated that no locally significant historic properties are in the study area.

The literature review gathered information from a series of maps and aerial images and various Internet sources. Two maps that include the study area were reviewed (Texas State Highway Department 1940, 1961); the study area is not depicted on maps the Sanborn Map Company developed for San Antonio. A series of aerial images that include the study area was analyzed (Nationwide Environmental Title Research 1955, 1966, 1973, 1986, 2004; Tobin International, Ltd. 1939, 1962, 1972; U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agriculture Imagery Program 2010). A few Internet sites provided information on the history of the proximate San Antonio International Airport and surrounding development (Bexar County Appraisal District 2012; Buchner 2012; North East Independent School District 2005a, 2005b; San Antonio International Airport 2012; *The San Antonio Light* 1938; San Antonio Public Library 2012).

The literature review revealed that the study area, with the exception of the bed of Salado Creek, was developed as agricultural cropland by the mid-twentieth century. Twelve wide, stubby lots lined the south side of the creek as late as 1939 (Tobin International, Ltd. 1939). Roadways and a few scattered farmhouses were in the vicinity (Texas State Highway Department 1940). In this agricultural setting, small communities had developed, with clusters of houses and sometimes a school or church. Just east of the study area was the closest community, Salado Valley. It was north of the present-day intersection of East Bitters and Wetmore Roads on Sommers Drive. The one-room, wood-frame Salado Valley School opened there in 1901 on privately donated land. In 1938, it was replaced by a one-story, multiple-room stone school building facing south onto Sommers Drive. Construction of the new school was funded with a \$4,000 bond issue and aid from the Works Progress Administration. The school consolidated with six others to form the North East Rural School District in 1949. The North East Independent School District formed in 1955, and the school served as the district's first central administration office until the building was demolished in 1958. In its place, a new administration building provided district offices from 1959 to 1972 (Buchner 2012; North East Independent School District 2005a:3, 2005b:3; *The San Antonio Light* 1938:1; Texas State Highway Department 1940; Tobin International, Ltd. 1939).

The study area's rural landscape was permanently altered after 1941, when the City of San Antonio purchased 1,200 acres of land for a municipal airport (San Antonio International Airport 2012). In 1940, the Civil Aeronautics Authority committed \$100,000 to the project in anticipation of a \$550,000 bond election. The proposed facility would cost \$1.5 million. The airport opened in July 1942 as Alamo Field, a World War II army training

facility. Here, the U.S. Army Air Forces 77th Observation Group trained reconnaissance personnel to fly various aircraft from late September 1942 until early April 1943. The airport reverted to municipal operations at the end of the war and was formally dedicated in 1949 (San Antonio Public Library 2012).

Although the San Antonio Municipal Airport would expand exponentially in subsequent decades, the 1950s proved critical to the fledgling airfield. A new terminal was under construction between 1951 and 1953. The control tower and a baggage area were also completed in 1953 (San Antonio International Airport 2012). By 1955, the airport had three runways that angled from northwest to southeast, northeast to southwest, and north to south, each providing opportunity to take advantage of particular wind conditions. At the northeast edge of the facility, just south of the Skyplace Boulevard extension project area, was a collection of airport-related buildings along two parallel east-west roads, First and Second Avenues, of about three blocks. Several small buildings were present along with a hangar and four larger buildings by 1955. The skinny concrete apron on the south border of this facility allowed access to both the east- and west-bound taxiways to the runways. A wide concrete apron on the west side of the facility provided access to north- and south-bound taxiways to the runways (Nationwide Environmental Title Research 1955). This area may have been used initially for the airfield's earlier military operation but was more likely built in the mid-1950s to provide aircraft maintenance, repair, and manufacturing.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the airport continued to evolve, as did the maintenance facility at its northeast edge near the current project area. By the early 1960s, the airport was surrounded by U.S. Highway 281 on the west, Interstate Highway 410 on the south, the International–Great Northern Railroad on the west, and smaller streets and Salado Creek on the north (Texas State Highway Department 1961; Tobin International 1962). The terminal had east and west wing additions completed in the late 1950s. The northwest-to-southeast runway had been extended by 1966 to serve as the principal runway. Three buildings were constructed between 1955 and 1966 at the maintenance facility near the current project area (Nationwide Environmental Title Research 1966). With the world's fair coming to the city in 1968, new passenger waiting rooms and a satellite area with eight jet-bridge gates were built (San Antonio International Airport 2012). By 1973, the northeast-to-southwest runway had been extended. One very large building was constructed between 1966 and 1973 on the western apron of the maintenance facility near the Skyplace Boulevard project area that was associated with Swearingen Aircraft Company. Ed Swearingen opened the business in 1959 to modify twin-engine Queen Air business aircraft by replacing the original fuselage and marketing them as the Merlin in the 1960s. The company's modifications became so substantial that by 1970, Swearingen began to build the entire aircraft. Fairchild Industries noticed Swearingen's new products and purchased the smaller debt-ridden company in 1971. Fairchild Swearingen operated at the maintenance facility for several years; the founder's name was eventually removed (Nationwide Environmental Title Research 1973; References for Business 2012).

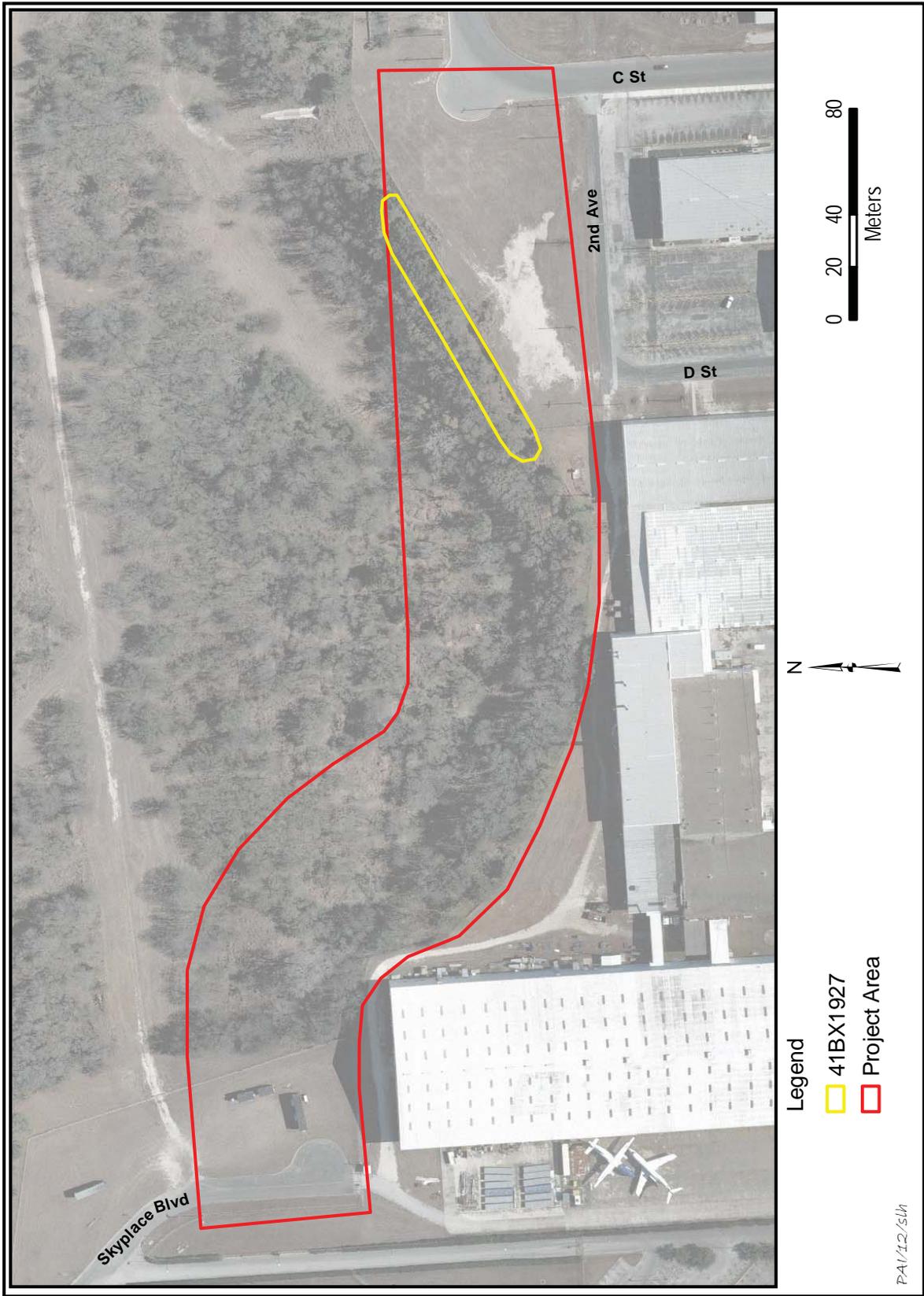
Since the 1980s, both the airport, now known as San Antonio International Airport, and the maintenance facility near the current project area have undergone additional development. A huge new terminal opened in 1984, and a new control tower was operational

in 1986. By 1986, the north-south runway was no longer in use. Fairchild Industries had lengthened the building at the maintenance facility, and four new buildings were present. One southeast of the Fairchild Industries building required demolition of existing resources (Nationwide Environmental Title Research 1986). By 2004, the building just east of the Fairchild Industries building had a substantial addition. There were two new buildings, including one with a large parking lot on the west side of the west apron (Nationwide Environmental Title Research 2004). Additional parking, improved roadway access, and two new terminals, including one that opened in 2010, were developed. The 1953 terminal closed in 2010 and was demolished the following year (San Antonio International Airport 2012). The maintenance facility is presently known as the airport industrial leasing area.

As a result of the file search and literature review, no further work for historical resources studies is recommended for the proposed project area. Extant resources considered historic-age are present, but they are not considered locally significant. Therefore, it is likely that the proposed project has no potential to impact significant known historical resources. However, should the proposed project become a federal undertaking at any point, a reconnaissance survey would be recommended to fully satisfy requirements for documenting historical resources.

## **RESULTS OF THE ARCHEOLOGICAL SURVEY**

Field investigations consisted of a 100 percent pedestrian survey and surface examination across the 7.9-acre project area (Figure 3). The project area consists of four distinctly different settings. One is the Salado Creek floodplain, which has been used as a dumping ground for construction-related debris for some time. Dump-truck piles 1.0–1.5 m high completely blanket and obscure the natural ground surface here, preventing inspection of the surface or shovel testing. The second setting is the southern valley wall of Salado Creek, which is somewhat steep and 3 m high at the east of the project area and 4 m high at the western end. Four large culverts from the uplands to the south transect the valley wall and indicate substantial subsurface disturbance. This area has also been used as a dumping ground, especially along the western two-thirds of the project area, which is capped in natural eroding gravels, large concrete chunks, asphalt, occasional bricks, and mixed debris; given the disturbance and lack of sediments, shovel testing was not possible here. The third setting is a narrow swath of less-disturbed upland surface between an airport security fence and the valley wall. Here, surface visibility is good as a result of sparse vegetation, recent feral hog trails, and hog rooting activities. A prehistoric lithic scatter, 41BX1927, was observed and recorded in this portion of the project area (discussed below). The fourth setting is a highly disturbed upland portion of the project area between the security fence and the large airport-related buildings to the south. At the far west end of the project area, a swath of the upland surface has been cleared and leveled. Three portable buildings appear at this location on a modern aerial photograph but had been removed by April 2012. A cleared wedge of uplands is at the east end of the project area. Large portions of this area have been paved, utility poles border the area on the south, underground utilities are present (based on the observation of a manhole cover), and earthmoving is evident near the east end where a portable building pad is present. Shovel testing was not done in this fourth setting because of the upland setting and extreme disturbance.



**Figure 3.** Modern aerial photograph of the survey area.

One archeological site was recorded on a narrow swath of undisturbed upland at the east end of the project area. Site 41BX1927, a lithic procurement site and associated surface scatter, spans ca. 120 m east-west but is limited to only a narrow swath (ca. 3–5 m) of upland immediately north of the security fence. Lithic materials observed include at least four cores and several large primary flakes. No diagnostic artifacts indicating its age and no burned rocks suggesting the former presence of thermal features were observed. Surface visibility was excellent, 70–100 percent. No shovel tests were excavated because of the good visibility and the presence of dense gravels on the surface, which indicate that this is an erosional environment with no potential for subsurface remains. The site may extend beyond the project area to the east but certainly has been truncated by disturbances to the south and west. Thus, 41BX1927 is a remnant of a larger disturbed surface site. Being highly disturbed and lacking subsurface deposits, it does not contain important information and is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a State Archeological Landmark. No further archeological work is recommended on 41BX1927.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Most of the 7.9-acre Skyplace Boulevard extension project area has been thoroughly disturbed. With the exception of a narrow swath of less-disturbed upland in its eastern third, the project area has been severely impacted by construction of improvements relating to the adjacent airport and associated buildings and discard of construction debris. The entire Salado Creek floodplain has been used as a dumping area and is completely covered with dump-truck loads of construction debris. While it is possible that archeological remains could lie buried in creekside alluvium below the construction debris, any such remains would not be impacted by the proposed project since the only activity in this area will be filling to create an embankment for the road. Archeological site 41BX1927 in the upland part of the project area is a surface scatter of prehistoric artifacts; it is disturbed and does not contain subsurface deposits, and it is not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or designation as a State Archeological Landmark. In short, no further archeological work is recommended for the Skyplace Boulevard extension project area. The project area does not contain any historical resources; as long as the project remains a nonfederal undertaking, no further work to document historical resources on adjoining lands will be necessary; if that changes, reconnaissance survey would be recommended.

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