

Protecting the Past

Cultural resources surveys

Before the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) approves a transportation project for construction, its Cultural Resources team studies how the project may impact archeological and historical sites. The first step is to identify known and potentially important sites within a project area through field survey. The survey results shape the project planning process.

TxDOT hires professional environmental consulting firms to complete cultural resources surveys. TxDOT supervises consultants and reviews submitted documentation. Consultants must have a certain amount of education and expertise prior to working on TxDOT projects. TxDOT may request "right of entry" to private property to conduct surveys.

Archeology surveys

- Below-ground resource documentation
- May include shovel testing, trenching, sifting, hand or machine excavations, and/or laboratory analysis.

Historic resources surveys

- Above-ground resource documentation
- Includes documentation from the roadway or on the property, library and local research.
- Surveys record resource location, construction date, architectural style, whether National Register of Historic Places listing requirements are met.



Frequently Asked Questions

Who is TxDOT?

We are the state agency responsible for planning, designing, constructing, maintaining, and operating state transportation facilities including roads, bridges, waterways, and airports in Texas.

What are cultural resources?

A term that collectively refers to buildings, bridges, archeological sites, cemeteries, sacred or religious landmarks, agricultural landscapes, and objects like sculptures and roadside markers.

Why does TxDOT complete cultural resources surveys?

Cultural resources surveys help TxDOT better understand how a proposed project may impact buildings, places, landscapes, objects, or sites that are important to the prehistory and history of our state. Once cultural resources are identified, TxDOT works to design transportation projects that limit harmful impacts.

Why does TxDOT have historians and archeologists?

TxDOT's Cultural Resources team ensures the agency follows laws related to the preservation of the historic built environment and archeological resources, such as the National Historic Preservation Act and the Antiquities Code of Texas. The team is tasked with balancing progress with the need to preserve significant resources and places.

Why are you taking photos of my property?

We are completing a survey of cultural resources that may be impacted by a proposed transportation project. The photographs are for recordkeeping purposes only. All photos are taken from the public right of way unless we have right of entry permission from the property owner.

Why are you digging? What happens to any artifacts you find?

Shovel tests help archeologists locate archeological sites. They are minimally invasive, and the ground is always restored to its original appearance, or as close as reasonably possible. If artifacts are found, TxDOT follows federal and state laws when caring for them. All artifacts found on public lands are managed by the State

of Texas and stored at certified facilities for protection and research purposes. All artifacts recovered from private property are returned to the landowner after documentation.

But my property isn't that old?

TxDOT studies properties that are 45 years old or older.

What qualifies a property to be historic?

TxDOT looks for properties that are at least 45 years old that have a documented connection with a historic event or notable person, or that have notable architectural or engineering design.

Who decides if a property is historic?

TxDOT historians and archeologists determine whether a property is historic after completing research and survey work. We also talk to the Texas Historical Commission, County Historical Commissions, and other state and local groups interested in history, historic preservation, and archeology to learn more.

What happens if my property is determined to be historic?

TxDOT's determinations about historical significance are for transportation planning purposes. They are not formal designations and require no obligations from you. Still, we encourage you to share information about your property's history with our archeologists and historians if they contact you.

How long does it typically take to plan and build a transportation project?

Where are we in the process?

The planning process can take several months to years, depending on the size and complexity of the project. Cultural Resources surveys are part of the "Design & Environmental" phase, where TxDOT reviews project plans based on possible environmental impacts and public input.

Are you taking my property for the project?

If you wish to discuss this project's impacts to your property with TxDOT, please call the TxDOT District Office.

Learn more about TxDOT's environmental responsibilities at txdot.gov, keyword "Environment"