



HISTORIC RESOURCES BACKGROUND MEMORANDUM, RAYMONDVILLE DRAIN PROJECT, HIDALGO AND WILLACY COUNTIES, TEXAS

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Received by RRP on May 15, 2023

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APE	Area of Potential Effect
BNSF	Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad
HCDD1	Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1
HCID13	Hidalgo County Irrigation District 13
NHL	National Historic Landmark
NHPA	National Historic Preservation Act
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
OTHM	Official Texas Historic Markers
ROW	right-of-way
RTHL	Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks
S&B	S&B Infrastructure, Ltd.
SAL	State Antiquities Landmarks
THC	Texas Historical Commission
TNRC	Texas Natural Resources Code
TAC	Texas Administrative Code
TxDOT	Texas Department of Transportation
US 77	US Highway 77
USACE	US Army Corps of Engineers
USGS	US Geological Survey

PROJECT DEFINITION

Project Name	Raymondville Drain Project, Hidalgo and Willacy Counties, Texas
Project Limits	<u>From 2.7 miles north of Lull in Hidalgo County, extending in a stairstep north and east toward Lasara, then along State Highway (SH) 186 and turning south, ending 2 miles upstream of State Highway 186 at the intersection with the existing Raymondville Drain, 5 miles southwest of Port Mansfield in Willacy County</u>
County	Hidalgo and Willacy Counties
Federal Permitting or Funding	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Area of Potential Effects Definition	Proposed 600-foot area of potential effects
Area of Potential Effects Explanation	600-foot APE proposed to account for indirect visual effects from project to historic resources
Historic-Age Survey Cut-Off Date	45 years or older, based on anticipated construction-letting date
Study Area Scope	1,300 feet from project footprint

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1 (HCDD1) is proposing the construction of new drains and a detention basin, and to expand the existing drainage system in Hidalgo and Willacy Counties (**Figure 1**). The project measures approximately 60 miles (96.6 km) in length and occupies a right-of-way that is typically 350 feet (106.7 meters) wide. The project encompasses 13.95 miles of proposed new drains, 45.35 miles of expansion of existing drains, and construction of a single 272-acre new location detention basin.

Due to the involvement of the USACE, the project is a federal undertaking and is therefore subject to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (36 CFR 800), as well as 33 CFR 325 (*Processing of Department of the Army Permits Appendix C—Procedures for the Protection of Historic Properties*) as well as portions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 CFR 1508). As a result, the project will require a permit from the USACE. Because the primary proponent of the project is the Hidalgo County Drainage District No. 1 (HCDD1), a political subdivision of the State of Texas, the project is also subject to the Antiquities Code of Texas. Archeological resources will be evaluated in a separate report.

Professional historians who exceed the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Historic Preservation* and the definitions presented in 13 TAC 26.5 have performed the background research presented in this section and will perform future field investigations.

This memorandum is intended to provide regulators with appropriate background information to determine what level of historic resources fieldwork will be required prior to construction of the project. The memorandum identifies previously documented historic buildings, cemeteries, historical markers, properties and districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and designated as State Antiquities Landmarks (SALs) within the study area. A literature review considering historic maps and aerial photos and a historic context of the region are also provided.

PROJECT SETTING

CURRENT LAND USE

The project area is in Hidalgo and Willacy Counties in South Texas. It extends north beginning near Lake Edinburg and continues east terminating southwest of Port Mansfield, Texas. The project encompasses a range of contexts, including agricultural fields, existing roadways, artificial waterways, and pockets of residential and commercial improvements and infrastructure.

PREVIOUSLY IDENTIFIED HISTORIC RESOURCES

A Stantec historian reviewed the Texas Historical Commission's (THC) Atlas map of previously identified historic properties, including properties listed in the NRHP, Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHL), Official Texas Historic Markers (OTHM), and historic cemeteries. The historian also reviewed the Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) Historic Resources Aggregator dataset. Although the THC Atlas does not offer mapped locations of SALs, the TxDOT data includes a feature class for SALs. The review presented in this report will focus on previously identified historic resources within a 1,300-foot study area surrounding the project area. A search of the two databases mentioned above yielded one NRHP/National Historic Landmark (NHL) district and two historic cemeteries (Table 1, **Figure 2a-f**). No NRHP-listed properties, RTHLs, OTHMs, SALs, or local historic landmarks are recorded within the 1,300-foot buffer. In addition, no previous historic resource surveys have been conducted in the study area, according to the TxDOT Historic Resources Aggregator dataset.

Table 1. Previously Identified Historic Resources within 1,300-foot study area

Previously Identified Historic Resources	Designation
King Ranch	NRHP- and NHL-listed district
El Cibolo Cemetery, HG-C039	Historic Texas Cemetery
Unknown (Northwest of El Sauz Ranch), WY-C020	Historic Texas Cemetery

LITERATURE REVIEW

NRHP PROPERTIES AND DISTRICTS

The King Ranch is an NRHP-listed historic district located within the 1,300-foot buffer. The Louisiana-Rio Grande Canal Company Irrigation System is an NRHP-listed historic district located well outside of the 1,300-foot buffer. It is discussed below because of historic themes relevant to the study area.

The King Ranch

The NRHP- and NHL-listed King Ranch intersects the study area (**Figure 2e-f**) and the area of potential effects (APE). The portion of the King Ranch within the study area is the property's southern reach and does not include the primary King Ranch complex with the main house, worker housing, outbuildings, and other buildings necessary for ranch operation. Most other contributing resources, including pens, corrals, and division headquarters, are north of the study area, along the old St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway (currently Burlington Northern-Santa Fe [BNSF]), that parallels US Highway 77 (US 77). The part of the ranch within the study area is likely ranch or brush land that may be used for livestock grazing. With vast landholdings accumulated in several counties over 150 years, the King Ranch's reported acreage varies substantially in various documents—the NHL documentation, the NRHP nomination registration form, and internal King Ranch administrative data—resulting in ambiguous boundaries. The operational boundaries extend approximately 1.25 million acres, of which the South Texas land encompasses approximately 825,000 acres. For the purposes of this report, the THC Atlas boundaries are considered approximately correct.

Louisiana-Rio Grande Canal Company Irrigation System

Located 20 miles south and southwest of the study area, the Louisiana-Rio Grande Canal Company Irrigation System includes approximately 45,000 acres of land and nearly 200 miles of canals and pipelines. The system was constructed in the early 1900s to support sugar cane, citrus, and other agricultural production. The northern boundary of the system is approximately 5 miles south of the study area. The system's most important and significant resources, the pumphouses, are in the southern portion of the system in McAllen and Hidalgo.

HISTORIC-PERIOD MAP AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH REVIEW

The historian conducted a review of available historic-period aerial photographs and topographic maps on Google Earth™ Pro (2023), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) (2022) Historical Topographic Map Viewer to consider how the corridor has been used in the past. Historic-period USGS topographic maps from 1953 to 1975 were reviewed (USGS 2023). The maps (1:24,000 scale) covering the study area are the Faysville (1963), Hargill (1963), Lasara (1957, 1970), Raymondville (1956, 1970), Yturria (1956), San Perlita North (1956, 1975), Willamar (1956, 1970), El Jardin (1956), and Port Mansfield (1953, 1975) quadrangles. A large-scale 1953 map (Brownsville, 1:250,000-scale) shows major highways like US 77 and US 281, as well as county roads. Subsequent maps reveal a growing network of smaller roads connecting communities with outlying agricultural fields. The 1950s and 1960s maps depict the communities of Edinburg, Faysville, Hargill, Lasara, Raymondville, and San Perlita, with additional historic-age resources apparent on 1970s maps. The South Texas International Airport-Edinburg, north of the study area, was the inactive Moore Air Force Base, Auxiliary Field No. 1, according to a 1963 USGS map.

These maps show the 1,300-foot study area is generally defined by limited development and broad expanses of agricultural fields. Maps from the 1950s and early 1960s depict isolated farmsteads, many since demolished, with open fields in their place. The study area extends into the northern portion of the

community of Lasara, with historic-age resources present in 1957 and 1970 maps. The southernmost portion of the project adjacent to Lake Edinburg has improvements indicative of Edinburg's northern expansion in the 1980s and later, though some pockets might include historic-age resources. The study area's eastern portion also extends into the El Sauz Ranch, north of State Highway 186, noted on a 1953 map.

The earliest available aerial imagery that depicts the study area is from 1950, followed by images from 1962, 1968, 1975, 1985, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2017. Aerial imagery corroborates information from the topographic maps, depicting the study area's extent with cultivated agricultural fields, small communities, and isolated residential and commercial development. The study area's western terminus, adjacent to Lake Edinburg, contains the highest density of residential improvements related to the northern boundaries of Edinburg that dates to post-1980. In Willacy County, the study area is particularly rural and dominated by agriculture, with some pockets of residential improvements adjacent to Lasara.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Spanish Colonization ca. 1690–1821

European settlement in the study area began in earnest in the late eighteenth century when Spanish ranchers applied for and received land grants (Garza 2011a). One of the largest land grants was for El Rancho de Santa Gertrudis, founded in 1794. Later, this ranch would become part of the King Ranch and, although sources vary on exact acreage, it encompasses approximately 825,000 acres in Nueces, Jim Wells, Kleberg, Brooks, Kenedy, Hidalgo, Willacy, and Cameron Counties (Texas Historical Commission 2023). For Spanish families living on the frontier during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ranching was the primary economic pursuit. Periodic Indian uprisings were a constant threat, and because of their isolation and vulnerability, Spanish settlers were forced to become self-sufficient.

The hacienda, rancho, or plaza housing arrangements that protected families and their livestock in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, were cultural focal points (Monday 2007). Plazas were constructed between 1750 and 1848, particularly in frontier environments where fortification was necessary (Bonine 2001; Upton 1986). The typical 1-acre compound had rectangular 1-story, flat-roof, 1-room stone buildings facing a central courtyard (Upton 1986; Bonine 2001). The stone buildings were coated both inside and out with flame-resistant lime concrete, and the flat roof was slightly below wall height to afford defenders protection against attack (Bonine 2001). These early houses had no windows or doors, and only one entrance (zaguan) into the compound. After the War for Mexican Independence (1810–1821), residents continued to construct fortified houses, adding decorative details to the exterior. An important evolution that occurred during this period was the addition of a second room to these otherwise small buildings (Bonine 2001). The introduction of these changes help guide researchers' understanding Spanish Colonial period dates of construction in Texas.

Less common in Texas were haciendas, agricultural complexes with houses, buildings, and structures associated with crop production. Ranchos were similar to haciendas except they focused on livestock raising and were more common in Texas. Both the hacienda and rancho were named and had a main house for the patron with surrounding worker housing. Jacales were intended as temporary buildings that utilized indigenous construction methods; this resulted in a house with a thatched roof and wattle-and-daub walls that could have a lime plaster coating.

Since these complexes also served as municipalities, they often had a school and church, sometimes a commissary, a small cemetery, and housing for animals and implements (Upton 1986; Montejano 1987). These Spanish-influenced property types remained largely intact on the rural landscape until after the 1910s Mexican Revolution, when a major wave of Anglo-American settlers were attracted to and made substantial improvements in the study area.

Anglo-Americans in South Texas (ca. 1830s–1860s)

When Anglo-American settlers arrived in the early 1800s, they secured a place in Hispanic society and began making distinct changes to the ranching landscape of South Texas, including marrying into prominent Hispanic families. By the mid to late nineteenth century, Mexican landowners found their titles in jeopardy as increased Anglo-American settlement forced them off their land (Garza 2011b). While housing retained many traditional Spanish- and Mexican-influenced elements, Anglo-American settlement introduced traditional regional styles from East Texas and the Gulf Coast states of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi.

During the nineteenth century, large, self-sufficient ranches composed of several thousand acres and nearly as many head of cattle dominated the Lower Rio Grande area (Montejano 1987). Salt for South Texas and Northern Mexico was provided by La Sal Vieja, a salt lake in the study area (Garza 2011b).

The area north of the Rio Grande was considered a vast wasteland, suitable for little aside from livestock ranching. Northern slaughterhouses were far away, and with no railroads, getting cattle to market was arduous and expensive. So long as the range was open and water was accessible, ranchers were able to drive their cattle north through the Wild Horse Desert, an area roughly bounded by the Rio Grande and Nueces River, stopping at natural ponds and isolated ranches for provisions and shelter. It was not until the enclosure of open rangeland with barbed wire fencing in the 1870s that the dynamics and landscape of South Texas changed (Montejano 1987). Land enclosure shifted property rights from landless and small-scale ranchers to large landowning ranchers (Montejano 1987). Small ranches were squeezed out, and the Coastal South Texas landscape changed significantly. By 1875, the region had several sizable, enclosed pastures ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 acres (Montejano 1987). By 1883, virtually all of South Texas was fenced (Montejano 1987). Cotton was planted during the same period and immigrants from Europe and the Deep South were attracted to its agricultural possibilities.

Heightened tensions between Hispanics and Anglo-Americans accompanied these economic shifts. Ideologies that had been established for generations were now challenged and forced aside. Some larger ranches owned by elite Hispanic families remained relatively unscathed, but Anglo-Americans confiscated numerous smaller Hispanic-owned ranches, reportedly burning some (Bryan 2008; Garza 2011a; Montejano 1987).

Farming practices were also changing. By the early twentieth century, the Bermuda onion's success and higher profit margin made it the primary cash crop in the region, replacing cotton (Garza 2011b). Once commercial agriculture became possible, investors showed increased interest in the region. However, with no direct railroad line, products could not be easily or cheaply exported to larger outside markets. The region's leading ranchers and businessmen, noting this deficit, pooled resources and had a railroad constructed that would reach their yields and promote greater productivity (Montejano 1987).

Arrival of Railroads, Irrigation, and Midwestern Settlers in South Texas (ca. 1904–1940)

Henrietta King, owner of the King Ranch and widow of Richard King, opened a large tract of the property approximately 3 miles east of the King Ranch complex in 1903, allowing the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway access to South Texas. By 1904, the railway was completed, connecting Brownsville to Corpus Christi with rail stops at the large ranches. Small towns platted along the railroad were several miles distant from one another but close enough that farmers and ranchers had improved access to goods. The railroad brought a second wave of Anglo-Americans to the region.

Once the railroads were constructed, ranchers, businessmen, and land agents advertised the region as an area of unlimited possibilities. South Texas settlement by Midwesterners was made possible by several factors, including more opportunity to travel. For the first time, Northern and Midwestern Anglo-Americans traveled to parts of the southern states on new railroad routes. (Meyer 2000). At the same time, improved treatments for malaria and yellow fever made the southern states more appealing to northerners. Towns quickly developed all along the new railroad corridor with each depot serving as a gateway to the community it served (Goldfield 1990). Advertisers and boosters met Midwestern farmers at train depots with great pomp and led them down a boulevard with lush tropical vegetation to see potential town lots or nearby farms. Housing options shown were often constructed in an idealized setting, using contemporaneously popular styles. The typical result was a prefabricated Craftsman-influenced bungalow, small and efficient to use and maintain. The application of then-modern housing styles enticed potential buyers to settle in the region that boosters espoused as the middle-class American ideal.

Because of the hot, subtropical climate in the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal South Texas, allowances in construction incorporated large, second story sleeping porches, open front porches, and pier-and-beam construction that improved air circulation. Brick or adobe construction was surrounded by shade-

producing plants. Many homes followed were Craftsman or Prairie influenced forms that Midwesterners embraced. Other common house styles exhibited Spanish Revival influences or had pyramidal forms with incised porches. In 1914–1915, the average farmhouse in the Rio Grande Valley cost approximately \$800 (Knight and Associates, 2007). This price coincides with a modest mail-order kit house price of the period that similarly averaged around \$800 (Sears Archives 2011).

As part of this demographic trend, the Raymond Town and Improvement Company brought prospective Midwestern farmers to Willacy County by railroad in 1904 and showed them around the area. Those who were interested purchased land (Addington 2011). One of the early settled towns was Raymondville, the Willacy County seat. Agriculture was the backbone of the community for several years; typical crops were cotton, citrus, sorghum, and vegetables. By 1914, the town had four general stores, a bank, newspaper, hotel, cotton gin, and lumber company. A decade later, Raymondville had approximately 1,800 residents (Addington 2011). During the Great Depression, Raymondville had a hospital, several churches, two schools, a courthouse, and a hotel. By 1941, the population was more than 4,000 and the town had 150 businesses. As the twentieth century progressed, Raymondville continued to develop and diversify. Its proximity to the coast and warm climate continues to attract tourists, particularly in the winter months. Manufacturing is available in the community with processing plants and industrial ventures. Currently, the population is approximately 9,700 (Addington 2011).

Hidalgo County developed similarly, with ranching playing the predominant economic role in its history (Garza 2011c). Early ranchers settled along the Rio Grande with their land extending away from the river, in long, narrow strips or *porciones*. Nineteenth-century farmers and ranchers were highly successful at exporting goods to Northern Mexico until the eve of the Mexican Revolution (Garza 2011c). Hidalgo County's mid-nineteenth-century history was raucous and colorful, with reports of outlaws using the area as a haven (Garza 2011c). Cattle rustling was a common problem, particularly after the Civil War.

Throughout the late nineteenth century, Hidalgo County experienced political problems and unrest. Ranching and farming remained the leading economic staples with primary crops of cotton, sorghum, corn, and vegetables (Garza 2011c). The county seat, Edinburg, originated as a small ranching community that expanded when irrigation was introduced and encouraged truck crop yields (Miller 2011). Like Willacy County, Hidalgo County experienced substantial change with the arrival of the St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway in 1904, when the county opened to Midwestern settlement and older ranches were subdivided into farms and small communities (Garza 2011c). One of these small towns, Faysville, was developed in the 1920s because of the railroad, although its population has never been more than 350 (Garza 2011d). Similarly, Hargill developed at the same time, with its own post office and railroad depot. In the twentieth century, Hargill had several stores, churches, and schools (Garza 2011e).

Hidalgo County experienced an analogous population boom in the early twentieth century when advertised for its ample mild climate with nearly year-round growing capabilities. With more than 85 percent of county land irrigated, crops like cantaloupe, carrots, cabbages, onions, and watermelons were produced (Garza 2011c). Citrus and cattle were also produced. In the twentieth century, Hidalgo County continued to grow and prosper. Like the rest of the Rio Grande Valley, it saw an influx of Mexican immigrants, many who lived in rural colonias. By the late twentieth century, more than 90 percent of Hidalgo County was either farm or ranch land and more than 50 percent was in cultivation.

Both counties developed, in large part, because of the irrigation districts constructed by speculators and interested parties in the Lower Rio Grande Valley at the turn of the twentieth century. Irrigation districts in the study area are the Delta Lake, Santa Cruz, and Hidalgo County Irrigation District 13 (HCID13, commonly known as Mission 16). The north bank of the Rio Grande was elevated above the water level, preventing gravity-driven runoff irrigation. Irrigation pumphouses and canals supplied a steady supply of

water that inspired more development. Farmers were able to grow truck crops and citrus fruits without impediment and, as technology improved, many irrigation districts were upgraded to remain functional.

As the twentieth century progressed, oil and gas were discovered in South Texas. Wells were drilled by the mid-1920s and continued to produce into the 1930s. While the Great Depression caused economic hardship or financial ruin for many ranchers, World War II and the postwar era offered new opportunities. Ranching underwent significant changes with technological advances that reduced the need for workers (Clayton 2001). Animal husbandry continued, and eradication of the screw worm resulted in less time spent examining pastures and treating infested cattle (Clayton 2001). Ranchers closed their bunkhouses to ranch hands and later rented them to hunters or those wanting to use recreational resources. Modernity, such as running water, telephones, and televisions, entered and altered their lives (Clayton 2001). Today, several large ranches in the study area lease portions of their land for hunting.

Postwar Growth and Development (ca. 1945–1965)

After World War II and on the heels of 15 years of stagnant housing growth, America's bursting population needed housing, and a building boom ensued. The postwar period was a robust time in the American economy, and with federally insured mortgage rates (30 years to maturity and nothing down) an estimated 12.5 million houses were built throughout the country by 1955 (Massey 1992, 2004). This era of prosperity in South Texas, with its favorable climate, was conducive to agricultural development, and people were attracted to the region.

Salaries were high during this period, but so was inflation, resulting in small, unadorned houses. Land, however, was cheap, and young families wanted to live in the suburbs and own a house (Massey 2004). Minimal Traditional Style houses were common in the early years after the war, but Ranch Style houses were most popular. Focus shifted from the front of the house to the back, with an outdoor patio and barbeque. These houses preferably were without stairs and had large yards and open interior plans. The typical 1950s ranch house had an obligatory picture window, small, high-set windows in the bedroom areas, one or more sliding glass doors to the back yard, and a large chimney, often visible, or even the focal point, on the front façade (Massey 2004). The exterior displayed a host of different materials like wood siding, rock or ashlar, and other popular elements. The result was homogeneous neighborhoods with curvilinear streets filled with families from similar backgrounds, educations, and life experiences. Automobiles were an important component of life in the suburbs, who often lived far enough from the nearest commercial district to prefer to drive a vehicle. No longer was shopping limited to downtown, as commerce transitioned to strip malls. This type of neighborhood and community development occurred throughout South Texas and is easily identified as postwar construction.

In the late twentieth century, ranching and farming remained important in South Texas. However, during this time other major economic and demographic drivers emerged, such as increasing numbers of both legal and undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries. Retirees from northern states began to see the area as an excellent winter residence or permanent retirement destination. The politics of these changes are beyond the scope of this memorandum, but one of the key economic trends is that services—both public and private, from medicine to education to hotels and restaurants—have joined farming and ranching as primary to the South Texas economy.

PROPOSED AREA OF POTENTIAL EFFECTS (APE)

The Raymondville drain project is planned to be mostly developed within the project footprint. Forty-five miles of the project includes widening of existing drains, with roughly 14 miles involving new drains. In addition, completion of a 272-acre detention basin is proposed. Direct project impacts include the excavation of soil; no direct effects to historic resources are anticipated. Indirect effects from the proposed project include visual effects, including temporary views of piles of excavated soil. As a result, Stantec proposes a 600-foot APE to account for potential indirect effects related to the project. Based upon review of historic-period maps and aerial photographs, isolated pockets of historic-age resources are within the 600-foot APE. A reconnaissance survey is warranted to identify historic-age resources in the APE, evaluate them for NRHP eligibility, and assess effects on historic properties from the proposed undertaking.

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APPENDIX

