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INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the provisions of the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, as implemented by 36 CFR Part 800 (*Protection of Historic Properties*, revised January 2001), and Chapter 6 of the Florida Department of Transportation *Cultural Resource Management Handbook* (revised), this case report documents the potential effects of the improvements along County Line Road (CR 578) to the Alexsuk archaeological site (8HE426) located in Masaryktown, Hernando County, Florida. The Alexsuk Site was identified during a cultural resource assessment survey that was conducted in 2001 as part of the Project Development and Environment Study (PD&E) phase of the proposed improvements to CR 578 from U.S. 19 (State Road [SR] 55) to U.S. 41 (SR 45) (Janus Research 2002). In a letter dated March 12, 2002, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with the opinion of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Seven and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that the Alexsuk Site (8HE426) is considered eligible for listing in the *National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)*.

Section 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966* is applicable to this project as federal funds are planned to be used in the construction of the improvements along CR 578. Based upon the Section 106 process, effects to the Alexsuk Site (8HE426) that may be caused by the Ayers Road Extension portion of the County Line Road improvements were evaluated by Janus Research.

The Ayers Road Extension portion of the County Line Road PD&E study area is a proposed 3.5 mile (6 km) road that will connect CR 578 with Ayers Road at U.S. 41. Two alternatives were evaluated for the Ayers Road Extension, including one (designated S-8) that would minimize impacts to the Alexsuk Site (8HE426). However, as it was determined that this minimization alternative also would encroach upon the site, the westernmost alternative (designated S-5 and which will be discussed later) was selected as the preferred alignment for the Ayers Road Extension. A no-build alternative also is being considered.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The CR 578 corridor is an east/west facility with a functional classification of a major collector. The project is located within Sections 1 through 6 of Township 24 South, Range 17 East; Sections 1 through 6 of Township 24 South, Range 18 East; Sections 25, 26, and 31 through 36 of Township 23 South, Range 18 East; and Section 30 of Township 23 South, Range 19 East in Hernando County (Figure 1).

The FDOT, in conjunction with Pasco and Hernando counties, is conducting a PD&E study to evaluate capacity improvement alternatives for CR 578. The proposed project involves improving CR 578 from a primarily two-lane roadway to a multi-lane facility from the vicinity of U.S. 19 (SR 55) to east of U.S. 41 (SR 45), a distance of approximately 12 miles (19 km).



Figure 1: Project Location Map

The portion of the project involving the site includes construction of a segment of new roadway, referred to as the Ayers Road Extension. This portion of the project is approximately 3.5 mi (6 km) in length.

PROJECT NEED

The need for improvements along the CR 578 corridor, including the Ayers Road Extension, is based on an evaluation of the following conditions:

- Current substandard traffic operations within the study area;
- The expected future traffic demands along the CR 578 corridor, and the projected future socioeconomic growth in northwestern Pasco and southwestern Hernando counties;
- Inadequate driver sight distances;
- Inadequate capacity as a designated evacuation route;
- Need for adequate pedestrian and bicyclist facilities;
- Improving access to the Hernando County Airport; and
- Providing a continuous route between U.S. 19 and CR 581 (see Figure 1).

The 2025 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) volumes that were projected by the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Model (TBRPM) indicate that a four-lane roadway will be required for CR 578 from U.S. 19 to U.S. 41 to provide acceptable levels of service.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Ayers Road Extension is within the vicinity of the Alexsuk Site (8HE426). The area proposed for the construction of the Ayers Road Extension is currently a residential and undeveloped agricultural area. Therefore, the Ayers Road Extension has no existing right-of-way (ROW).

PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

During the PD&E Study, various roadway alternatives have been developed and cultural resource surveys conducted for each alternative. As a result of these surveys, the *NRHP*-eligible Alexsuk Site (8HE426) was identified. In an effort to avoid or minimize encroachment into the Alexsuk Site, a minimization alternative (S-8) for the Ayers Road Extension was developed in lieu of the recommended alternative (S-5) that was preferred by the local community at the Alternative Public Workshop conducted in December 2000. The S-8 alternative for the Ayers Road Extension is shown in Figure 3. All Ayers Road Extension alternatives generally extend from CR 578 east of the Suncoast Parkway and connect to the Ayers Road Extension at U.S. 41.

Although the S-8 alternative would impact the Alexsuk Site, it would avoid the most dense portions of the site. Additionally, no evidence of quarrying activities or diagnostic Paleoindian/Early Archaic artifacts were identified within the Ayers Road Extension S-8 alternative. However, because the S-8 alternative would have more effects to the Masaryktown community and the general public did not favor this alternative, the S-5 alternative was chosen as the preferred alignment. The proposed typical section, which will consist of a 155-ft ROW, is included in Figure 2. The preferred alignment (S-5) will include stormwater management facilities, the number, size, and locations of which have yet to be determined. A no-build alternative also is being considered.

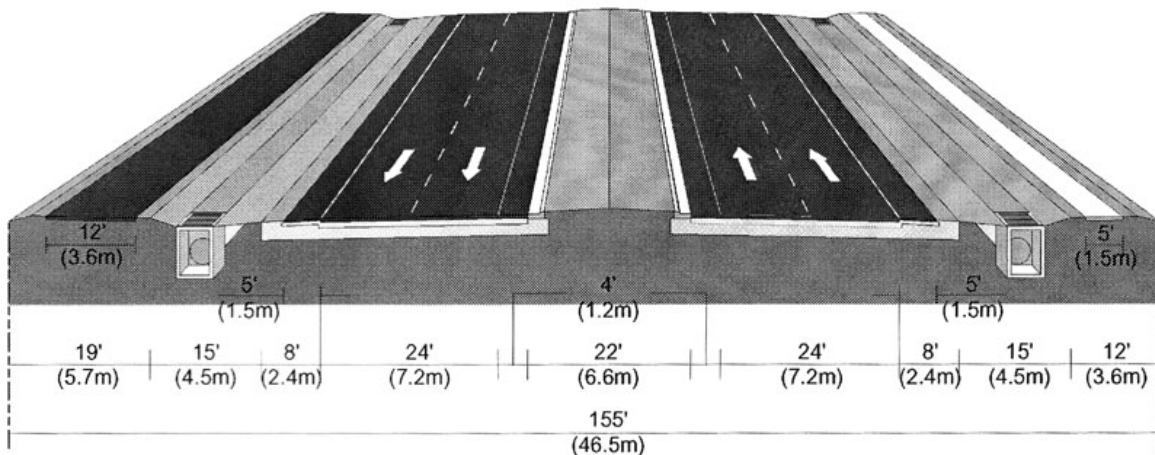


Figure 2: Typical Section

Figure 3: Proposed Alternatives for the Ayers Road Extension

CULTURAL SETTING

For the purposes of this report, a brief summary of the pertinent pre-Columbian background is included here to place the Alexsuk Site (8HE426) in its proper context. A more extensive Precontact Overview is included in the *Cultural Resource Assessment Survey Report* prepared by Janus Research (January 2002).

Paleoindian Period (12,000–7500 BC)

The earliest cultural manifestation recognized in Florida is the Paleoindian period, which dates from the arrival of the first human populations (about 12,000 BC) to roughly 7500 BC (Milanich 1994:37). The prevailing view of Paleoindian existence, based on the uniformity of the known tool assemblage and the small size of most of the known sites, is that of a nomadic existence based on hunting and gathering, including hunting of the now-extinct Pleistocene megafauna.

One site similar to the Alexsuk site, the Colorado site, is located in Hernando County and has a Paleoindian component (Horvath 2000). The Colorado site also had distinguishable occupation areas, ranging in date from the Paleoindian period through the Middle Archaic and post-Archaic periods. This site was interpreted as a series of short-term occupations related to the procurement of chert from outcrops in adjacent sinkholes. Lithic reduction activities centered primarily on bifacial blank production and core manufacturing. A range of tools similar to those found at the Colorado site were found at site 8HE426, including oblong scrapers, cores, blanks, Florida Archaic Stemmed points, and expedient tools (Horvath 2000:82–98).

Archaic Period (7500–500 BC)

The Paleoindian period is followed by the Archaic period (7500–500 BC), which has been divided into three periods: Early Archaic (7500–5000 BC), Middle Archaic (5000–3000 BC) and Late Archaic (3000–500 BC) (Milanich 1994:63). The beginning of the Archaic period is marked by interrelated environmental and cultural changes. The establishment of increasingly modern climate and biota necessitated modifications in pre-Columbian settlement and subsistence patterns. Archaic populations hunted smaller game and learned to exploit their environment more efficiently than their Paleoindian predecessors. These adaptive changes resulted in a somewhat more sedentary lifestyle and an increase in the number and types of archaeological sites.

Formative and Mississippian Periods (500 BC–AD 1513)

At the end of the Late Archaic period, changes in pottery and technology occurred in Florida; these changes mark the beginning of the Formative period. Fiber-tempered wares were replaced by sand-tempered, limestone-tempered, and chalky temperless ceramics. Also, three different projectile point styles (basally-notched, corner-notched, and stemmed) occur in relatively contemporaneous contexts. This profusion of ceramic and tool traditions suggests population movement and social interaction between culture areas. The Formative period in the North Peninsular Gulf Coast region is comprised of two phases: the Deptford (500 BC–AD 200) and Weeden Island-related (AD 200–800) phases (Milanich 1994). The final pre-Columbian cultural

manifestation to occur in this region was the Safety Harbor culture, which evolved out of the Deptford and later Weeden Island–related Deptford cultures. In the Central Peninsular Gulf Coast region, the Manasota phase (500 BC–AD 300) occurred as the earliest phase, followed by the Weeden Island–related and Safety Harbor phases (Milanich 1994).

Deptford Phase (500 BC–AD 200)

Deptford culture sites extended over a wide geographic range. Sand-tempered ceramics with simple, check, or linear check stamped designs and burial mounds began to be adopted at this time. In the area extending from central Pasco County to the north, the use of limestone as a tempering agent in the manufacture of ceramics increased in popularity. Deptford peoples probably exploited a wide variety of plant and animal resources from both coastal and inland settings.

An archaeologically recognizable complex associated with the Deptford culture began to appear about 150 BC. Known as the Yent complex (Sears 1962), it involved long-distance trade with other native cultures of the Southeast. Marine shell, shale, and ceramic vessels were exchanged for copper, galena, mica, and metamorphic stone. These exotic items, which are found as grave offerings in burial mounds, were highly valued prestige items that conveyed elevated status to the individuals who possessed them. Individuals responsible for orchestrating trade between groups had access to these exotic items, and through their accumulation and display, were able to reinforce and enhance their status within the community (Sears 1962).

Manasota Phase (500 BC–AD 300)

During the Formative period, the Central Peninsular Gulf Coast region was dominated by the Manasota culture, primarily known as a coastal-dwelling people. Their material culture is characterized by a dominance of sand-tempered plain ceramics as well as shell and bone tools (Luer and Almy 1982). The identification of interior Manasota sites has been hindered by the difficulty in distinguishing between the various types of undecorated, sand-tempered ceramic wares used by the different pre-Columbian cultures of southern Florida (Milanich 1994: 224–226).

Weeden Island–related Phase (AD 200–800)

The Weeden Island–related phase succeeds the Deptford phase in the North Peninsular Gulf Coast cultural region and the Manasota Phase in the Central Peninsular Gulf Coast region. The term “Weeden Island” is used to refer to several distinct, regional cultures that shared the same basic ceremonial complex dating from roughly AD 200–1000 (Milanich 1994). The Weeden Island cultural “heartland” was located in northern Florida, southern Georgia, and Alabama. Therefore, all Weeden Island cultural manifestations in lower peninsular Florida are referred to as “Weeden Island–related.” Mound burial customs, artifact evidence of an extensive trade network, and settlement pattern data suggest a complex socio-religious organization while technologically and stylistically, Weeden Island ceramic types are considered outstanding examples of aboriginal pottery.

More extensive excavations are needed to establish regional chronologies, subsistence patterns, and social, political and ceremonial customs. However, it appears that Weeden Island groups led

a relatively sedentary lifestyle. Villages were located along the coast as well as at inland locations. Coastal sites are characterized by the presence of shell deposits and a sand burial mound. Since not all villages possessed a mound, it is likely that several communities shared a single continuous-use mound (Willey 1949).

Safety Harbor Culture (AD 800–1725)

Mississippian cultural development began in the central Mississippi Valley beginning about AD 750 and was adopted by cultures in Florida between AD 800 and 1000. It was characterized by elaborate community developments including truncated pyramidal mounds, large plazas, and a chiefdom-level of socio-political organization. Other distinctive traits include the use of the bow, small triangular-shaped projectile points, religious ceremonialism, increased territoriality and warfare, and, in some areas, development of agriculture (Milanich 1994:355–412).

The Safety Harbor culture is the only Mississippian period manifestation and the last pre-Columbian cultural complex to appear along the peninsular Gulf Coast. Milanich and Fairbanks (1980:210) describe this phase as a Mississippian adaptation to a specialized coastal environment. The Safety Harbor culture is typified by ceremonial centers with truncated, pyramidal temple mounds and open village plazas surrounded by middens, as well as burial mounds with associated charnel structures. Most Safety Harbor sites are found along the coast, although inland villages, camps, and mounds are present as well (Milanich 1994:395, 403).

Archaeological data and ethno-historical accounts suggest that these people possessed a complex socio-political and religious system indicative of chiefdom (Bullen 1978). The settlements were clustered around ceremonial centers, or “temple towns” (Goodyear 1972; Luer and Almy 1981), which were reported to be the focus of religious and political activity. These ceremonial sites all have similar layouts—all contain a flat-topped pyramidal temple mound with an adjacent plaza and village midden. Many of these sites also contain burial mounds. The large ceremonial centers tend to be located in coastal areas (Luer and Almy 1981).

ALEXSUK SITE (8HE426)

Site 8HE426 represents a large scatter of pre-Columbian ceramics and lithic artifacts that extends across multiple karst solution features within the proposed Ayers Road Extension alternatives. It is situated in an upland mixed forest natural community at an elevation between 59 ft and 65.6 ft (18 m and 20 m) above mean sea level. This site is located in the southern half of Section 25 and the southeastern quarter of Section 26, Township 23 South, Range 18 East on the Masaryktown USGS Quadrangle (1954 PR 1988) in Hernando County, Florida.

The Alexsuk Site is overlain and partially disturbed by the Enville Site (8HE284), a historic town site dating to the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Although the SHPO determined there was insufficient information to determine the eligibility of this site for the *NRHP*, the SHPO also determined that, based on the testing of the proposed road alternatives, no significant portions of the Enville Site would be impacted by the proposed construction (Letter to James St. John, FHWA, from Janet Snyder Matthews, SHPO, March 12, 2002).

Archaeological testing of site 8HE426 identified three occupation areas (A, B, and C) (see Figure 3). The locations of all three occupations appear to be associated with the adjacent sinkholes (Figure 4), most likely for the procurement of available resources such as fresh water and usable chert for tool manufacturing. In general, it is hypothesized that the occupations represented by this site were seasonal, logistical campsites that were repeatedly occupied. Diagnostic artifacts recovered from Areas A, B and C suggest that these areas represent different temporal components.

Area A, which is located around the westernmost sinkhole within the site area, represents at least two pre-Columbian occupations: one component dating from the late Paleoindian (12,000–7500 BC) to the Middle or Late Archaic period (5000–500 BC) and a post-Archaic (post-500 BC) component. Activities represented in this area consist primarily of late-stage tool manufacturing and sharpening as well as some core reduction and early- to middle-stage tool production. In support of this hypothesis was the presence of a small core recovered in the Formative period component and a preform recovered from the late Paleoindian through Middle to Late Archaic period component of Area A. This area, along with Area B, appears to have been the most intensively occupied areas of the site.

Area B, situated around the middle sinkhole, represents two pre-Columbian occupations: one probable Archaic period (7500–500 BC) component and a Weeden Island through Safety Harbor period (AD 100–1513) component. Data indicates that the Weeden Island through Safety Harbor component may be limited to the northernmost portion of Area B. Pre-Columbian activities represented in this area of the site were identical to those represented in Area A, including minor quarrying and core reduction, basic camp maintenance activities, and all stages of tool manufacturing, especially projectile point/knives. However, data also indicates that lithic reduction activities in that portion of Area B contained within the APE for the Ayers Road Extension minimization alternative (S-8) primarily consisted of middle- to late-stage tool manufacturing. By contrast, the primary lithic reduction activities in that portion of Area B located to the north and west of the sinkhole seem to have consisted mainly of late-stage tool manufacturing and sharpening.

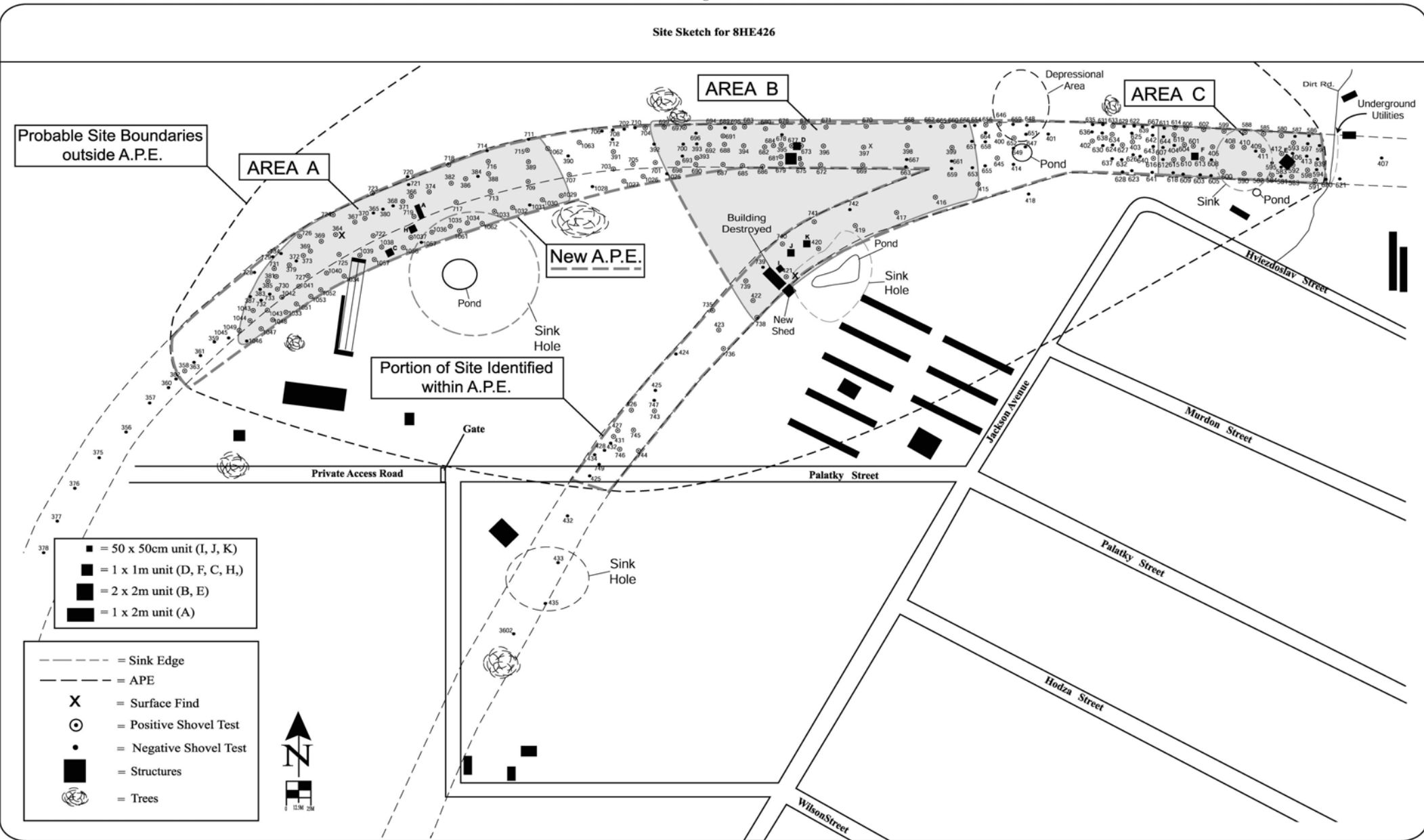
Area C, situated around the easternmost sinkhole, represents a Middle or Late Archaic period (5000–500 BC) component. Pre-Columbian activities represented in this area of the site included middle- and late-stage bifacial tool production. The recovery of one Florida Archaic Stemmed (possible Newnan subtype) point, which was most likely used as a knife, indicates some camp maintenance or subsistence-related activities may also have occurred.

The Alexsuk Site (8HE426) is considered regionally significant as it represents multiple periods of occupation, indicating patterned use of the area in the Paleoindian, Middle to Late Archaic, and post-Archaic periods. This site contains data that has the potential to address regional research questions, such as how and why relatively nomadic Paleoindian groups developed into semi-sedentary Late Archaic groups in peninsular Florida, and whether any variation in this development occurred in different regions of the state. Comparison of this site to similar sites in

Figure 4: Site Sketch for 8HE426

Figure 2

Site Sketch for 8HE426



the interior of Central Florida and similar sites in other areas may yield patterns indicating regional trends in the development of sedentism. In a letter dated March 12, 2002, the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with the opinion of the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Seven, and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that the Alexsuk Site (8HE426) is considered eligible for listing in the *National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)*.

Boundaries of the Alexsuk Site (8HE426)

The Alexsuk Site is located in the southern half of Section 25 and the southeastern quarter of Section 26, Township 23 South, Range 18 East on the Masaryktown USGS Quadrangle (1954 PR 1988) in Hernando County, Florida. The site measures at least 1,241 ft (378.5 m) north-south and 4,800 ft (1,463 m) east-west, for a total area of approximately 137 acres. The boundaries of the site were determined by the presence of cultural material within the project corridors and by extending probable boundaries beyond the limits of the project corridors tested. Cultural material was identified using surface inspection and shovel testing. Furthermore, the site boundaries include the sinkholes that appear to have been the focus of the occupations represented at the site. The area of the site that will be impacted by the preferred alignment (S-5) is approximately 18.8 acres. It is very likely that the site extends further north and west of the tested alternatives of the Ayers Road Extension.

IMPACTS ON SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL RESOURCES

The preferred alignment (S-5) for the Ayers Road Extension will pass through the Alexsuk Site (8HE426). This route will bisect the site at an approximate northeastern angle. Alternative S-5 will pass through heavy artifact concentrations (Areas A, B, and C) associated with Paleoindian period (12,000–7500 BC) and through Mississippian period (AD 800–1513) components of the site. The preferred alignment (S-5) will include stormwater management facilities. Impacts to the Alexsuk Site (8HE426) caused by these features will need to be evaluated once plans for them have been developed. A no-build alternative also is being considered.

DETERMINATION OF EFFECTS

Following an evaluation of the preferred alignment (S-5) for the Ayers Road Extension, a determination of effects was developed as stipulated by Section 106 of the *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966*, as implemented by 36 CFR Part 800 (*Protection of Historic Properties*, revised January 2001). As part of this assessment, various effects to the Alexsuk Site (8HE426) were considered (Janus Research 2002). Subsequent to an evaluation of the project and its possible effects to the site's characteristics that qualify it for listing in the *NRHP*, it has been determined that this project will have an **adverse effect** on the Alexsuk Site (8HE426).

The following is the **criteria of adverse effect** as defined by 36 CFR Part 800:

An adverse effect is found when an undertaking may alter, directly or indirectly, any of the characteristics of a historic property that qualify the property for inclusion in the National Register in a manner that would diminish the integrity of the property's location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association. Consideration shall be given to all qualifying characteristics of a historic property, including those that may have been identified subsequent to the original evaluation of the property's eligibility for the National Register. Adverse effects may include reasonably foreseeable effects caused by the undertaking that may occur later in time, be farther removed in distance or be cumulative.

The Alexsuk Site was determined to be significant under Criterion D of the *NRHP* due to its potential for addressing regional research questions related to variability in the development of sedentism from the Paleoindian through Safety Harbor periods, specifically in central Florida. The most intensively occupied portions of the site, which appear to be associated with adjacent sinkholes, are designated Areas A, B, and C. The preferred alignment (S-5) will bisect the Alexsuk Site and all three of these occupation areas. The impacts of the proposed stormwater management facilities associated with the preferred alternative (S-5) will need to be evaluated once their locations have been selected

In conclusion, as the proposed road construction and improvements will directly alter the characteristic of this archaeological site that qualifies it for inclusion in the *National Register*, this project will have an **adverse effect** on the Alexsuk Site. The characteristic that qualifies this site for inclusion in the *NRHP* is the potential for recovering data that would address research questions regarding: 1) the development of sedentism and variability in this development within peninsular Florida; 2) the effects of changes in settlement patterning on lithic technology; and 3) variability in strategies for lithic raw material procurement in response to settlement and mobility patterns. Unless the no-build alternative is selected, the preferred alternative (S-5) will be constructed within a new right-of-way that bisects the Alexsuk Site.

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