

Project Area Ground Disturbance

If your project entails disturbing the ground, you are encouraged to conduct background research on the types of archaeological sites that may be present within the project area. The research should include an archaeological records check with the University of Iowa – Office of the State Archaeologist. [I-Sites Public Access](#) provides general information about recorded archaeological sites. It will show you how many recorded archaeological sites are within a section of land. A section is one square mile.

If you need more precise information about your project area, submit a request using the [Request for Iowa Site File Search Form](#). Fill out the form and submit it, along with the required fee, to the UI-Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA) at the address provided on the form. OSA will let you know more specifics about the archaeological sites within a one-mile radius of your project area. OSA can also let you know if your project area has been previously surveyed for archaeological resources.

This check is useful for making a good faith effort to determine whether any previously recorded burial mounds, human remains, or cemeteries are located on the property. These types of sites must be protected from disturbance per the [Iowa Code](#).

Other useful background research includes examining historic maps, aerial photographs, and historic records to determine past land-use history. The [Iowa Geographic Map Server](#) provides a variety of maps and aerial photographs. Take some time to explore this tool! On the Iowa Geographic Map Server, you can find historic maps such as the General Land Office maps (surveyed between 1832 and 1858) and the Andreas Atlas (published in 1875); United States Geological Survey (USGS) topographic maps; soil surveys maps; aerial photographs from the 1930s to the present; and other useful items.

An easy way to get started with the Iowa Geographic Map Server is to scroll down to the bottom of the front page, where you can search either by name of City or by Section, Township, and Range. If you select, say, “Des Moines,” the image on your screen will show the City of Des Moines. Along the left side of the screen, you will have many options. Scroll through the options under “Select a base map layer” and toward the bottom of those choices you will find “Hillshade from 1-meter LiDAR.” Select that option, then refresh the map. LiDAR is a relatively new tool. It shows very small differences in elevation on a parcel, and is good for seeing man-made features.

Other online sources provide other historic maps. The Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps, are available through the [State Library of Iowa](#). In order to get access, first you have to get a library card from the State Library of Iowa.

The [University of Iowa Library](#) has a good description of the Sanborn maps.

You might also explore the [Iowa Heritage Digital Collections](#) to find digitized historic maps and photographs from collections across the state.

An archaeological survey is the best way to determine whether a proposed project will affect archaeological properties. Archaeological surveys should be conducted prior to any land disturbance or construction activities. The Association of Iowa Archaeologists’ provides the [Guidelines for Archaeological Investigations in Iowa](#) and a list of [archaeological consultants](#). Both of these items can aid in planning an archaeological survey.