This report summarizes cultural resource data recovery investigations at Laboratory of Anthropology (LA) 99382 and LA 140202 along United States Highway 82 (US 82), between Hope and Artesia in Eddy County, New Mexico. The project area is located along Eagle Draw, a tributary of the Pecos River. LA 99382 is a historic homestead site dating to the early twentieth century; it contained an artifact scatter and seven features, four of which were located within the APE and were fully excavated during this investigation. LA 140203 includes a series of irrigation ditch segments that are adjacent to, and likely contemporaneous with, the homestead. Although these two sites were referred to as the “Riley Homestead” in the data recovery plan, the land patent for the homestead was issued to William Byrd in 1905. The two sites will, therefore, be referred to collectively as the “Byrd-Riley Homestead” throughout this document.

The Byrd-Riley homestead was at the center of a cluster of homesteads along Eagle Draw approximately 6 miles east of Hope. Most of these homesteads were settled between 1905 and 1910, as residents of Hope began to settle on increasingly marginal lands and speculate on the potential of irrigation projects to bring water to areas that were otherwise unsuitable for agriculture. The Riley family was at the center of this speculation, which began when Lizzie Riley filed a claim for land along Eagle Draw, purchased water rights from her husband, and constructed a ditch that diverted water from the Hope Community Ditch on their farm and carried it 6 miles east to her new property. Although she filed the patent and officially “purchased” some of his water rights, these endeavors were likely the work of Willis P. Riley, and he quickly bought additional property along this new ditch. The role of the Riley family in this settlement expansion was likely part of Willis’ pattern of speculating on property either through purchase or land entry, which was made possible by the wealth the Rileys had accumulated due to their successful apple orchards and the favorable location of their original farm. When William Byrd married Dicie Belle Riley in 1907, he was marrying into a family that was well-established in the Hope community.

Despite initial success, it quickly became clear that irrigation agriculture was not feasible along Eagle Draw. Engineering issues likely played a role, and it seems that the distance from the Rio Pecos proved to be insurmountable. There is also some evidence that rainfall in the 1910s was less abundant than previously, and geologic factors greatly reduced the flow of the Rio Pecos in the early 1920s. Settlement contracted between 1915 and 1920, and by the 1930s the land along Eagle Draw had returned to ranch land. The Byrd-Riley homestead provides a convenient point of reference to study this broader pattern of settlement expansion and contraction due to its location at the far margins of the Hope community and its association with the family that was instrumental in these attempts to expand the agricultural system. Similarly, the story of the Riley family personalizes historic developments in the town of Hope – the formation of the community, the expansion of homesteading and irrigation, the eventual settlement contraction, and, finally, the emigration of many settlers by the 1930s.

In this study, the authors employed different scales of analysis and an eclectic methodology that combined archaeological excavation, archival research, oral history interviews, and GIS analysis. Archival information provided specific information about the occupational history of the site, while archaeological data provided broad information about site structure (how the homestead was organized spatially, where trash was deposited, and how domestic space was arranged), land use and economics, and other topics, while also illuminating specifics such as the presence of a harmonica, the use of a bone toothbrush, or a lost marble. At a broader scale, local histories and newspaper articles chronicled the major events of the Hope community, while oral history interviews provided information about what life was actually like for earlier settlers, and GIS analysis provided an empirical demonstration of expanding settlement and irrigation in the study area.