



Bridging the Basin: Land Use and Social History in Southern Chuska Valley

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Between 2011 and 2013, archaeologists from Statistical Research, Inc., investigated a total of 26 archaeological sites situated along a 30 mile stretch of the highway U.S. 491 southern corridor on Navajo Nation Trust lands, located between Sheep Springs and Twin Lakes, New Mexico. The U.S. 491 highway project corridor extends slightly within the southern margin of the central Chuska Valley and transects across a large portion of the southern Chuska Valley within Tohatchi Flats. A total of 20 sites (NM-H-62-112, NM-H-62-105, NM-H-62-101, NM-H-62-99, NM-Q-3-76, NM-Q-3-75, NM-Q-3-74, NM-Q-3-72, NM-Q-3-58, NM-Q-3-39, NM-Q-14-73, NM-Q-15-56, NM-Q-15-52, NM-Q-15-29, NM-Q-15-51, NM-Q-15-49, NM-Q-15-46, NM-Q-15-43, NM-Q-15-41, NM-Q-15-28) were mitigated owing to impacts from the proposed expansion of U.S. 491, and an additional 6 sites (NM-H-62-16, NM-Q-3-14, NM-Q-15-55, NM-Q-15-53, NM-Q-15-106, NM-Q-15-42) included surface manifestations located immediately outside of the construction zone and were tested for the potential of buried deposits within the area of potential effects (APE). Only one of the tested sites (NM-H-62-16) yielded intact subsurface remains within the construction zone, warranting full-scale data recovery activities. The remaining tested sites were all found to be contained outside of the APE. Portions of the 21 archaeological sites that extended into the proposed construction zone were subject to complete excavation. Results of the archaeological investigations revealed a total of 51 components ranging from the Early Archaic to the Historical period. The archaeological sites revealed a broad spectrum of human occupation in the Chuska Valley, ranging from ephemerally used logistical sites to densely aggregated village settings.