Prairie Island Indian Community  Mower County Historical Society

Request for Proposals

Archaeological Investigations at the Grand Meadow Chert Quarry/Wanhi Yukan Preserve

Overview

The Mower County Historical Society (**MCHS**) and the Prairie Island Indian Community (**PIIC**) are seeking an experienced archaeological team and geophysics firm (**Vendor**) to conduct up to 30 days of field work at the Grand Meadow Chert Quarry/Wanhi Yukan Archaeological and Cultural Preserve (**the Preserve**) in Mower County, Minnesota. Bids will also include time for lab work and a written file report.

The successful bidder must have substantial experience in archaeological excavation, and either the equipment and direct experience for applying geophysical research technologies or a plan to subcontract with a firm capable of using such technologies within an archaeological site. Such technologies combined with remote sensing will be utilized prior to any subsurface research investigations at the site. Indigenous monitoring and cultural advice will be provided by PIIC.

The Vendor will be responsible for providing a Field Director, a Geophysics Specialist, a Soils Specialist, a Field Team for excavations, and a staffed lab for preparing artifacts prior to final accessioning by MCHS. MCHS will provide a Lithics Consultant and a Public Communications and Media Liaison, and PIIC will provide daily Indigenous monitoring and oversight.

Bids must not exceed $94,000.

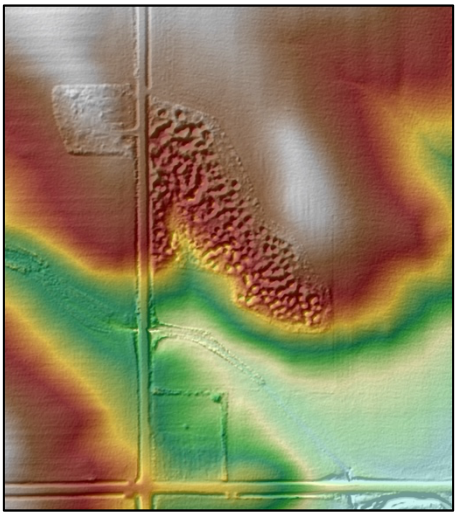
Please note: *A grant request from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund administered through the Minnesota Historical Society is pending. The project will proceed only if that application is successful. Funding notification will occur in May 2026.*

The Site

The Grand Meadow Chert Quarry/Wanhi Yukan Archaeological and Cultural Preserve is the small remnant of an Indigenous open-pit chert quarry in southeastern Minnesota. Found within the larger Grand Meadow Chert Quarry, a 170-acre site on

the National Register of Historic Places, the 15-acre Preserve contains nearly 100 intact pits that were dug most likely between 1050CE and 1450CE, using handheld tools of stone, bone, and wood.

Each pit was dug to reach a layer of nodules of Grand Meadow chert (**GMC**), a high-quality stone particularly favored during the Middle Mississippian era for the manufacture of scrapers, an essential tool for preparing hides. For at least 7,000 years prior to that, chert from this location was easily found exposed in local stream beds. It was used for making all types of chipped stone tools, including spear points, darts, knives, awls, and later, arrowheads. Grand Meadow chert has been found at archaeological sites in 52 counties in Minnesota, and in Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Dakota.



The original Grand Meadow Chert Quarry (21MW0008) was the most extensively utilized Native American site in the state for providing stone for making tools, and the only example where there is visible evidence of where chert was extracted through digging. The 15-acre Preserve is one of only a few such places regionally with visible quarry pits, and stands out for its remarkable condition: except for the trees and shrubs that have appeared since the prairie fires ended when farming started, it appears virtually unchanged from its last day of use.

For more information, please see:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Meadow_Chert_Quarry/Wanhi_Yukan

The Project

The Mower County Historical Society and the Tribal Historic Preservation Office of the Prairie Island Indian Community have collaborated since 2020 in the development of the chert quarry for public education, and together created the bilingual interpretive program along the Wanhi Yukan Trail. This project, the first extensive subsurface research to be conducted within the Preserve, represents an extension of that partnership for the purposes of data recovery and the pursuit of new knowledge.

Archaeological research within the Preserve for 2026-27 will address specific questions (chosen with the Vendor from the list in *Questions*, below) related to the creation of this chert quarry and the activities that occurred there. Of special interest will be efforts to locate datable materials that can verify the time frame for the quarrying that occurred within the Preserve. The locations for investigation and proposed procedures will be determined by the **Project Team**, consisting of the Field Director, the Geophysics Specialist, the Lithics Specialist, the Soils Specialist, a PIIC representative, and the Project Director.

Three main approaches will be employed in areas to be selected by the Project Team: 1) geophysical investigations involving Magnetic Field Gradiometry and Electrical Resistivity (GPR is optional) will be used to locate and identify areas of interest for further research; 2) soil coring in areas selected to ascertain soil profiles and to locate strata prior to potential excavation; 3) excavation via shovel tests, trenches, or units as determined by the Project Team. Preference will be given to locations that have an increased possibility of providing datable results.

This is an extraordinarily well-preserved site of special significance to the descendant communities whose ancestors came here to procure a unique resource. All potential disturbance within the chert quarry will be monitored by an Indigenous individual who carries the cultural and/or historical knowledge of their community. They will be available daily for consultation and advising, both to the members of the Vendor's team, and to the visiting public.

All work conducted at the chert quarry is available for public education and observation. The MCHS Project Director will be the on-site liaison for public visitors and for media inquiries, but Vendor team members should be prepared to cooperate with public interactions and media requests.

Questions To Selected From for Consideration

These are among the many questions that have been proposed for the long-term Research Program at the chert quarry. Prior to beginning field work, the Project Team will jointly determine which of these are the most appropriate and accessible during this first field season. The Project will employ a sense of flexibility in order to deal with field findings and unanticipated field conditions.

- Where did the people come from who dug the pits?
- How exactly did they quarry for the chert, and with what tools?
- When did the mining of pits begin, and end?

- Where were the first and last pits dug?
- Can the sequence of activities or direction of extraction work within pits be determined?
- For what purposes, if any, were the previously dug pits used? Were they shelters from the wind for building fires, or used for sleeping, or used to store quarrying tools?
- Were the numerous ramps in the larger pits built from back dirt during extraction, or were they the original landscape just left intact?
- Is there evidence of gifts being offered to the earth within the quarry?
- Is the ocher that occurs within the chert quarry natural or there by human transport? Does it show evidence of being utilized or modified by heat?
- In addition to acquiring stone for tools, might the chert quarry have been a reliable meeting place among distant contemporary communities?
- Does the nearby surrounding landscape reveal activity areas that go beyond acquiring or reducing chert?
- Is there any evidence for cultural, social, or specific ceremonial activities?
- Did groups gather there to form larger hunting parties before the seasonal bison hunts in the nearby prairies?
- Did they return after hunts to replace their tool kits, possibly leaving behind discarded or broken tools?
- How much time did they spend at the chert quarry during a visit?
- What phases of stone tool manufacture occurred within the chert quarry?
- What role did trade have in the scale of extraction at the chert quarry?
- What other materials were involved in the exchange?
- Is it possible to positively identify a buried pit in the plowed fields using remote sensing, geophysics, or coring?
- What was used to fill in the pits for agricultural activity in the surrounding fields? Was additional fill used to fill the holes, or just the back dirt piles?
- In pits now beneath cultivated fields, are there original undisturbed strata remaining that might be of value archaeologically?
- Are there indications of multiple episodes of extracting stone from a pit, after its initial construction?

Scope of Work

Initial Preparation and Geophysical Research:

- Establish a datum and grid for the full 15-acre Preserve and an additional 5-meter perimeter.

- Meet with the Project Team to establish a plan for selecting areas and potential features for applying intensive use of geophysics.
- Employ Magnetic Field Gradiometry in multiple selected areas. Review results with the Project Team for evaluating options.
- Use Ground Penetrating Radar (optional) if considered advantageous.
- Electrical Resistivity – distribute electrodes in selected areas following results from the MFG or GPR applications.

Soil Coring:

- Coring in areas selected for further investigation. Coring will occur prior to any excavation activities.
- Coring in some areas may be more intensively utilized, as an alternative to excavation depending on the information being sought.
- Soil coring should be available during all excavation activities, to be employed as needed.

Probable Subsurface Investigation:

- The bottom of two pits will be examined, and compared.
- Possible trenching in the wall of a selected pit.
- Bisection of a possible "ramp" that may have been constructed as part of the techniques for extracting the dirt from the holes during construction.
- The investigation of a flat area, to be selected, that may represent a once-deep pit that was used for disposing of baskets of excess dirt from nearby holes.
- Profiling of an apparent former pit in a cultivated area, using soil cores.

Excavation Protocol:

- For all field procedures the Vendor is expected to follow the Phase 3 standard excavation procedures in the OSA Archaeological Manual.
- Specialized methodologies for further defining the stratigraphy within a quarry pit or other feature, such as photogrammetry or the collection of micro textures from the sides of excavations, may be proposed.
- Soil coring, shovel testing, and excavation locations must be recorded using a GPS device to determine the exact location of each feature and each procedure. Locations to be noted on a base map to be provided, using the most current lidar imagery for the site.
- Although removed dirt is to be screened with at least ¼ inch mesh, finer screening or flotation may be appropriate based on the questions and methods suggested by the Project Team.
- Critically important floral and faunal evidence may be present, and collected for further analysis. If outside expertise is required, those expenses will lie outside of this bid and timeline.

- Screened GMC debitage and other materials will be sorted between those to be reburied on site, and those that may deserve further attention.
- Material to be reburied will be removed to a nearby repository for later reburial on the site. Screened dirt will be backfilled into its hole by the end of the field season.
- Bagged and labeled materials are to be cleaned in an appropriate facility, and returned with labels and field notes to MCHS for permanent curation.

Project Deliverables:

- A copy of all of field notes generated for each feature provided to MCHS, which serves as the repository of record for the GMC Quarry.
- Evaluation notes for each soil core taken.
- Shape files and a map with GPS locations for each work area and feature investigated, including geophysics transects and soil coring locations. A base map using low-level drone lidar will be provided.
- Bagged materials washed, labeled, and cataloged by Vendor using MCHS accession protocols, and delivered to MCHS for final archival storage.
- A file report with details regarding each procedure employed by Vendor, with photos and maps for each location.

Additional Budget Details – Beyond the Bid

- Indigenous monitoring, oversight, and advice during daily field activities and report writing will be provided by PIIC.
- Archival storage of recovered artifacts will be the responsibility of MCHS.
- Deposition of redundant or rejected stone material after screening will be the responsibility of PIIC and MCHS.
- If biological or other materials discovered during this field work require additional time and expertise for analysis and analysis, that work and expense will take place beyond this field project and be the responsibility of MCHS.
- The MCHS Project Director will be on site during all field work to assist in the coordination and scheduling of all activities, and to provide support as needed. He is also available for assistance with the report.
- Housing is being contributed as a Match by a local landowner; Vendor may choose to use that option or include hotels or camping within their bid. Camping with a firepit is available on site; MCHS will provide a portable rest facility. Contact MCHS for further details.
- A food allowance for Vendor's team should be included with the bid; a portion can be applied to the housing option if Vendor chooses to board

their team with that family. Breakfast and dinner will be included. Further details are available from MCHS.

- Bids will be considered up to $94,000.

Proposed Timeline*

3.2.26	RFP deadline.
3.5.26	Zoom call with the selected Vendor.
3.6.26	Submission of final proposal.
May	Notification of Award; contract process begins.
June	Zoom call among Project Team to discuss logistics, scheduling, and the research questions to be addressed.
June	Contracts among all parties completed; Project begins.
June	First days of geophysics.
July	Geophysics at multiple locations, excavation begins.
July	Coring and small excavations in two existing pits.
July	Coring of a prairie pit to establish modern fill procedures and to ascertain the archaeological integrity below the plow zone.
August	Excavation of one of the flat spots that show signs of having been filled in by baskets of dirt.
August	Trench through a ramp between 2 pits, to determine construction.
Sept-April	Lab work: artifact cleaning, analyzing, photographing, cataloging or ceremonial reburial on site.
April	Additional field work, if needed
May	Report preparation.
May	Press release to media with summary of results
6.1.27	Final grant day; Final Report submitted within 30 days

* The final scheduling of field work will be determined by the Vendor.

Proposals and Selection Criteria

Content

- Please include a list of key personnel to be involved, including the Field Director and the geophysics and soils specialists, with a brief statement regarding their relevant experience.
- Provide three contacts who would be available to offer commentary regarding their experience working with the Vendor.

- Provide a budget that indicates the ability to accomplish the Scope of Work within the proposed timeline.

Evaluation

MCHS and PIIC will consider the following factors in the evaluation of proposals:

1) professional qualifications of the Vendor's individual team members;
2) the experience of the team with similar archaeological sites;
3) the capacity to complete the project within the allowed time;
4) the ability to achieve goals while working in a cost effective manner;
5) a demonstrated skill for working in a collaborative atmosphere;
6) experience working respectfully with tribal communities;
7) responses received from references;
8) appropriateness of general approach as outlined;
9) any other factors considered to be in the best interests of MCHS & PIIC.

Conditions of Receipt of Proposals

In evaluating the proposals all of the above criteria, including overall value, will be considered. This is a quality-based selection process.

MCHS and PIIC reserve the right, at their own discretion: (1) to reject all submissions received; (2) to accept a submission without further discussion; (3) to reject a submission due to defects, irregularities or provisions inconsistent with this RFP; and (4) to negotiate directly with respondents for other terms, prices and conditions deemed proper and reasonable for the completion of the project. MCHS & PIIC also reserve the right to waive irregularities in proposal contents or to request supplemental information from bidders. This provision will be liberally interpreted to permit consideration of all proposals received by the stated deadline for submission.

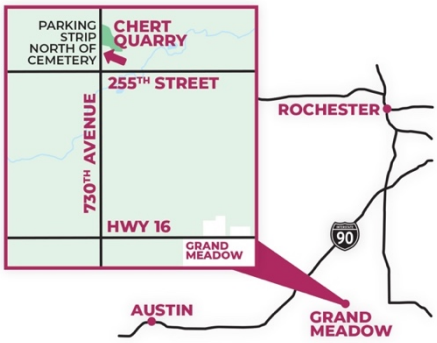
Contract Details

- The Contract will be managed by the Mower County Historical Society, in partnership with the Tribal Historic Preservation Office at the Prairie Island Indian Community.

- The field work will be accomplished as much as possible in Summer/Fall 2026, but can if necessary include time in the spring 2027.

- The final day for any billable activity for this project, including report preparation, is June 1, 2027.

Location and Access



The site is approximately 25 miles south of Rochester, MN, and 25 miles east of Austin, Mn.

A 3,750ft trail provides access throughout the site, and a large staging area for vehicles and equipment is at a trail entrance on the east side. A gravel driveway from 730th Ave to the staging area is on the north end of the property.

Proposal Submission

Questions are welcome by phone or email.
Please submit an application no later than **11:59 pm on March 2, 2026** to:

Randal J. Forster, Director
Mower County Historical Society
director@mowercountyhistory.org

(507) 437-6082

This project is made possible in part by the voters of Minnesota by a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society through a legislative appropriation from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund.