
National Park Service
Cultural Landscapes Inventory
2024



West Hills Farm
John Muir National Historic Site



**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

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June 14, 2023

Refer to NPS_2022_1229_001

[VIA EMAIL]

K. Lynn Berry, Superintendent
National Park Service
John Muir National Historic Site
440 Civic Center Plaza, Suite 300
Richmond, CA 94804

Re: Ref. # 1.A.2_P_JOMU Continuing Section 106 consultation on Mount Wanda Comprehensive Site Management Plan

Dear K. Lynn Berry:

The California State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) received the consultation submittal for the above referenced undertaking for our review and comment pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations found at 36 CFR Part 800. The National Park Service at John Muir National Historic Site sent Step Two of an ongoing consultation, requesting SHPO concurrence on the eligibility of historic properties to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

Undertaking

The Mt. Wanda Comprehensive Site Management Plan at John Muir National Historic Site in Martinez, California is intended to build on legislation that established the planning area to provide a vision for the future. The Mt. Wanda planning area is a 370-acre portion of the historic Martinez ranch where John Muir lived and worked with his family. The plan for Mt. Wanda will identify new visitor opportunities and functions, facility needs, and resource management strategies, while improving the connectivity of Mt. Wanda to other areas of the park and the broader community. The Comprehensive Site Management Plan will define appropriate uses and functions, balancing visitor use, climate change considerations, facilities, and natural and cultural resources management, and improving the connectivity between Mt. Wanda, the Muir House, the Strentzel-Muir gravesite, adjacent public lands, and the surrounding neighborhoods. Overall, the plan will sketch what Mt. Wanda will look like in 15 to 20 years.

To comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and NPS policy, the Plan is expected to be evaluated through an environmental assessment (EA). The Plan will identify issues and concerns and present a reasonable range of management alternatives for public review.

Area of Potential Effects (APE)

The Area of Potential Effect for this project encompasses the 330 acres of relatively undeveloped NPS land comprising Mt. Wanda. It also includes the adjacent (to the south) 44-acres owned by John Muir Land Trust that will soon be transferred to the NPS. The National Historic Site is comprised of three discontinuous areas: the Muir Home site—north of CA State Highway 4, the Gravesite—east of Mt. Wanda, and the Mt. Wanda plus soon to be added West Hills Farm area. The APE does not include the Muir Home site or the Gravesite—it only includes Mt. Wanda/West Hills Farm. NPS did not request that the SHPO comment on the APE in Step Two.

Identification of Historic Properties

Two previously listed or determined eligible historic properties exist within or immediately adjacent to the Area of Potential Effect, and received SHPO concurrence on their eligibility in 2004/2005:

- John Muir National Historic Landmark
- John Muir National Historic Site Cultural Landscape.

In the Mt. Wanda Area NPS identified one site it determined was a contributor to the historic site of the John Muir National Historic Landmark, Muir Olive Orchard, Feature 4, near Strain Ranch.

- Pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4(c)(2), NPS has determined that Muir Olive Orchard is a contributing feature of John Muir National Historic Landmark. **I concur.**

In the Mt. Wanda Area NPS identified the following seven sites that it determined were not contributors to the historic site of the John Muir National Historic Landmark. In the instance of Strain Ranch Bungalow, NPS determined the site was ineligible for the NRHP as an individual property:

- Main Fire Road
 - Farm Road, Strain Ranch
 - Strain Ranch Bungalow
 - Strain Ranch Buildings and Structures
 - Concrete Trough, Feature 1
 - Stock Pond, Feature 2
 - Circular Metal Trough, Feature 3.
- Pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4(c)(2), NPS has determined that the features listed above are not contributing features of John Muir National Historic Landmark. **I concur.**
- Pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4(c)(2), NPS has determined that Strain Ranch Bungalow is not eligible to the NRHP under Criteria A-D. **I concur.**

At West Hills Farm (outside the John Muir National Historic Landmark boundary):

NPS determined Swett Olive Orchard (18-336-04) was eligible for the NRHP.

- Pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4(c)(2), NPS has determined that Swett Olive Orchard is eligible to the NRHP under Criteria A, B, & C. **I concur.**

NPS determined that the following features were not eligible to the NRHP:

- Shed
 - Road Cut
- Pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.4(c)(2), NPS has determined that Shed and Road Cut at West Hills Farm are not eligible to the NRHP under Criteria A-D. **I concur.**

We appreciate NPS's efforts to comply with Section 106 and integrate the protection of cultural resources in its planning process, and we look forward to consulting further on this undertaking. If you have questions please contact Susan Negrete, Historian II, with the Local Government & Environmental Compliance Unit by email at susan.negrete@parks.ca.gov.

Note that we are only sending this letter in electronic format. Please confirm receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a horizontal line.

Julianne Polanco
State Historic Preservation Officer

Cc: Gretchen Stromberg, [Gretchen Stromberg@nps.gov](mailto:Gretchen_Stromberg@nps.gov)

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Introduction

Cultural Landscapes in the Cultural Resources Inventory System

CRIS is the National Park Service's database of cultural resources on its lands, consisting of archaeological sites, historic structures, ethnographic resources, and cultural landscapes. The set of CRIS records for cultural landscapes is referred to as CRIS-CL. CRIS-CL records conform to a standardized data structure known as the Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI).

The legislative, regulatory and policy directions for conducting and maintaining the CRIS are as follows: Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act, NPS Management Policies (2006), Director's Order 28 (Cultural Resources) and Director's Order 28a (Archeology).

The Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI)

The CLI is the data structure within CRIS used to document and evaluate all potentially significant landscapes in which NPS has or plans to acquire any enforceable legal interest. Each CRIS-CL record is certified complete when the landscape is determined to meet one of the following:

Landscape individually meets the National Register of Historic Places criteria for evaluation; or,
Landscape is a contributing element of a property that is eligible for the National Register; or,
Landscape does not meet the National Register criteria, but is managed as cultural resources because law, policy or decisions reached through the park planning process.

Cultural landscapes are varied in type and include historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and historic ethnographic landscapes; however, a cultural landscape also may fit within more than one type. Those cultural landscapes eligible for the National Register have significance in the nation's history on a national, state, or local level, as well as integrity.

The legislative, regulatory and policy directions for conducting and maintaining the CLI within CRIS are as follows:

The *National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 USC 470h-2(a)(1))*, which states that “Each Federal agency shall establish...a preservation program for the identification, evaluation, and nomination to the National Register of Historic Places...of properties...”

Executive Order 13287: Preserve America, 2003. Sec. 3(a), which states that “...Each agency with real property management responsibilities shall prepare an assessment of the current status of its inventory of historic properties required by section 110(a)(2) of the NHPA...No later than September 30, 2004, each covered agency shall complete a report of the assessment and make it available to the Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Secretary of the Interior...”

Executive Order 13287: Preserve America, 2003. Sec. 3(c), which states that “each agency with real property management responsibilities shall, by September 30, 2005, and every third year thereafter, prepare a report on its progress in identifying...historic properties in its ownership and make the report available to the Council and the Secretary...”

The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Federal Agency Historic Preservation Programs Pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act, 1998, which provides under Standard 2 the guidance that follows: “An agency provides for the timely identification and evaluation of historic properties under agency jurisdiction or control and/or subject to effect by agency actions (Sec. 110 (a)(2)(A) and Sec. 112.”

Management Policies 2006. 5.1.3.1 Inventories, which states that “The Park Service will (1) maintain and expand the following inventories...about cultural resources in units of the national park system...Cultural Landscape Inventory of historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes,...and historic sites...”

Cultural Resource Management Guideline, 1997, Release No. 5, page 22 issued pursuant to Director’s Order #28, which states that “As cultural resources are identified and evaluated, they should also be listed in the appropriate Service-wide inventories of cultural resources.”

General Information

Cultural Landscape Inventory Name	West Hills Farm
Cultural Landscape Inventory Number	976296
Park Name	John Muir National Historic Site
Park Alpha Code	JOMU
Park Org Code	8510
Property Level	Landscape

Landscape Description

The West Hills Farm cultural landscape is a forty-four-acre parcel adjoining the Mt. Wanda Unit of the John Muir National Historic Site to the south. Located in the upper Alhambra Valley region of Martinez, Contra Costa County, the site is bound to the south and east by residential subdivisions, to the north by the Mt. Wanda Unit, and to the west by the wooded foothills of Franklin Ridge. The cultural landscape constitutes forty-four acres of the historic 185-acre Hill Girt Ranch, a fruit ranch and vineyard operated by the Swett Family from the 1880s through the 1960s and includes within its boundary an olive orchard from the late-nineteenth century that stands evidence to the early agricultural period of Contra Costa County, a period during which Alhambra Valley was studded with orchards and vineyards on the hills and valley floors.

The West Hills Farm cultural landscape is locally significant under National Register Criterion A as reflective of the early agricultural experimental development in Contra Costa County in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The period of significance begins in 1881 when the Swett Family acquired the Alhambra Valley property and ends in 1889, the earliest confirmed date of the olive orchard on the Swett Family land. West Hills Farm retains historic integrity and effectively represents the early, experimental period of agriculture in Contra Costa County.

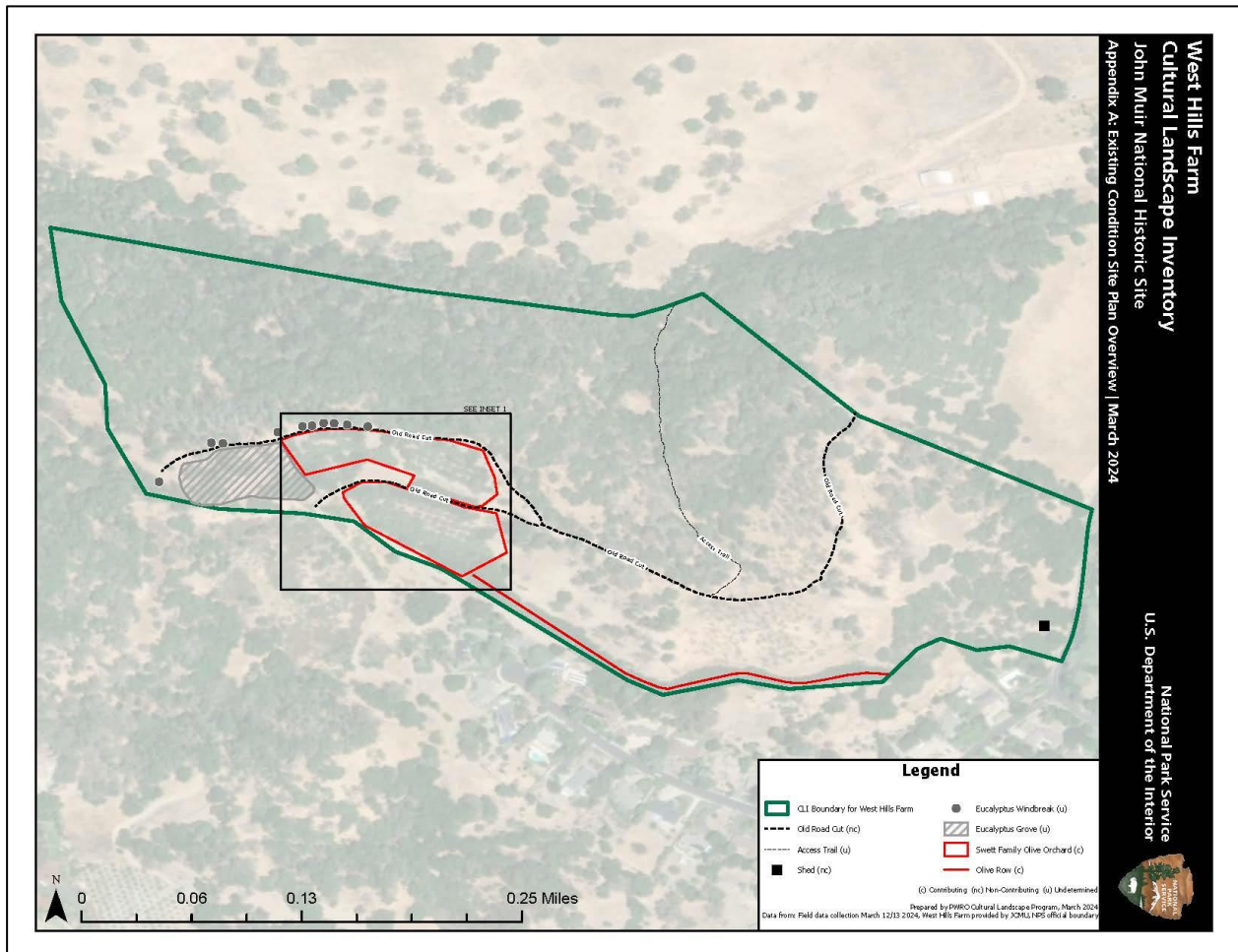
Landscape Hierarchy Description

West Hills Farm is a landscape without any component landscapes.

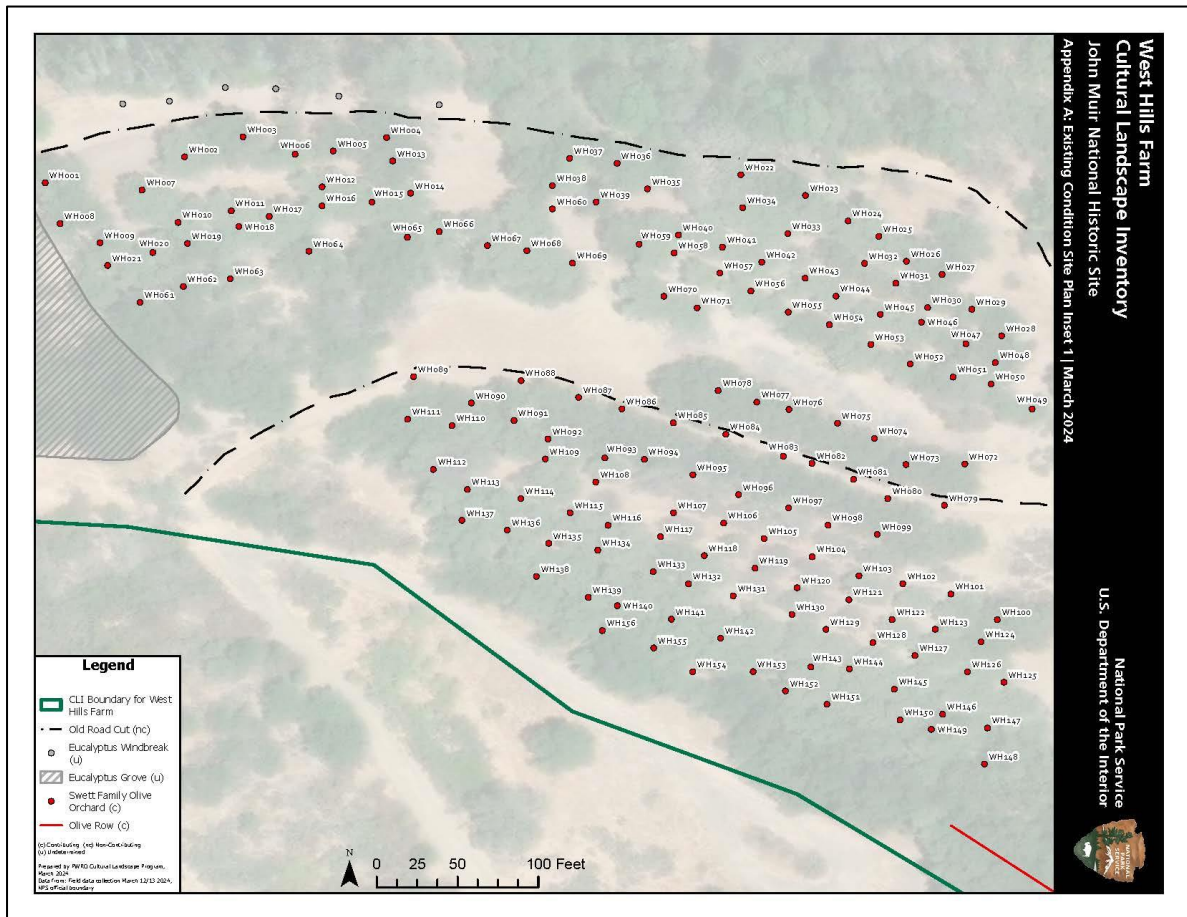
Landscape Type

Historic Site

Site Plan



Site Plan. Existing condition site plan of West Hills Farm. See Appendix A for a full-size plan (NPS, 2024).



Site Plan Inset 1. Existing condition inset map of the olive orchard in West Hills Farm. See Appendix A for a full-size plan (NPS, 2024).

Other Names

Name	Type
West Forty	Current
Hill Girt Farm	Historic
Hill Girt Ranch	Historic
Hill Girt Vineyard	Historic
Swett Ranch	Historic

Concurrence Information

Park Superintendent Concurrence

Yes

Park Superintendent Concurrence Date

03/18/2024

Completion Status Explanatory Narrative

This CLI adopts the research and documentation in the *Final Archaeological Resource Report in Support of the John Muir National Historic Site and Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site Project, Contra Costa County, California* prepared by PaleoWest in 2021 and the *Genetic Analysis and History of the Mount Wanda Olive Orchard at John Muir National Historic Site* prepared by the University of California, Davis, Foundation Plant Services and National Park Service in 2021. Based on these reports, with supplemental research and fieldwork in March 2024, the historic context, physical history, and the analysis and evaluations for the CLI were completed by Sang Bae (Historian in the NPS Regional Cultural Resources and Science Program). During the 2024 site documentation, individual orchard trees were tagged by Keith Park (Horticulturist and Arborist in the EUON Administrative Unit and the WASO Cultural Landscape Program) and Mikayla Gregory (JOMU Facilities Intern) and GIS data collection was conducted by Carli Henderson and Kasey Long (Regional Cultural Resources and Science Program GIS Interns). CLI graphics were developed by Kasey Long and the preparation of the CLI report was completed by Sang Bae in 2024.

Geographic Information

Area (Acres)

44 acres

Land Tract Number(s)

01-119

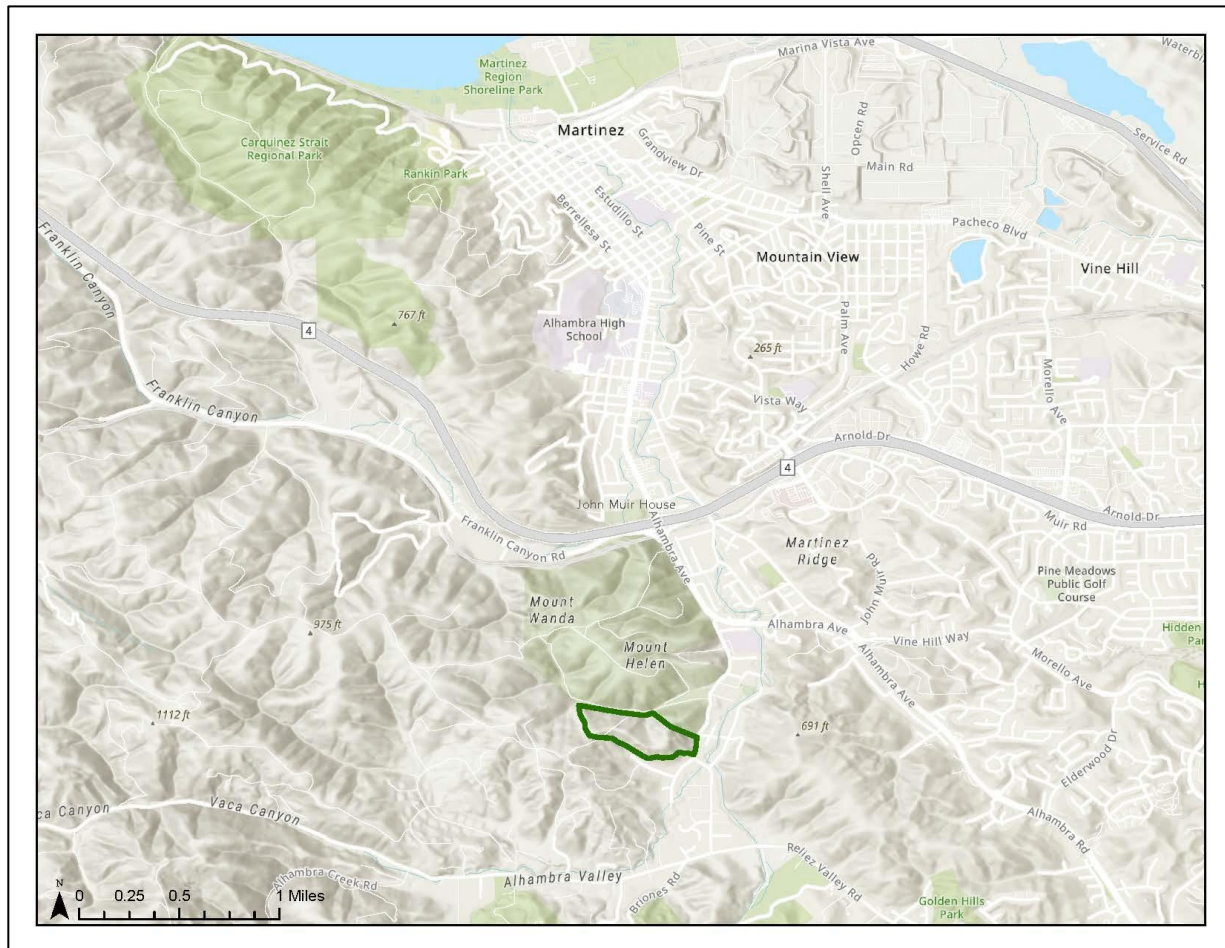
Boundary Description

The cultural landscape comprises the entire forty-four-acre parcel, which is bounded by the Mt. Wanda Unit to the north, Alhambra Valley Road to the east, the olive row to the south, and woodlands to the west.

Latitude/Longitude

Geometry	Latitude	Longitude	GeoDatum	Elevation (Meters)	Position Source	Position Accuracy
Point	37.975264	-122.132511	1984 WGS		Google Satellite Imagery	Other

Location Map Graphic Information



Location Map. Location map of the West Hills Farm south of the John Muir House and the Mount Wanda Unit of the John Muir National Historic Site. The boundary of the cultural landscape is represented in a bold green outlined polygon, (NPS, 2024).

State and County

State

California

County

Contra Costa

Management Information

Management Category

Should be Preserved and Maintained

Management Category Date

03/18/2024

Management Category Explanatory Narrative

The inventory unit meets the following criteria for Management Category B: it meets National Register Criteria (A, B, and C), and the inventory unit is compatible with the park’s legislated significance.

Management Agreements

Management Agreement	Other Management Agreement	Management Agreement Expiration Date	Management Agreement Explanatory Narrative
None			

Legal Interests

Legal Interest Type	Fee Simple Reservation Expiration Date	Other Organization/Agency	Legal Interest Narrative
Fee Simple			

Adjacent Lands Information

No – Adjacent lands do not contribute

Uses Information

Functions and Uses

Major Category	Category	Use/Function	Historic Use	Current Use	Primary Use
Agriculture/Subsistence	Farm (Plantation)	Farm (Plantation)	Yes	No	Yes
Recreation/Culture	Outdoor Recreation	Outdoor Recreation	No	Yes	No

Public Access

Unrestricted

Associated Ethnographic Groups

Ethnographic Study Status

No survey conducted

Ethnographic Groups

Ethnographic Group	Type
Ohlone	Both Current and Historic
Costanoan	Both Current and Historic

National Register Information

Documentation Status

SHPO – Documented

Documentation Narrative Description

Historic resources within the cultural landscape inventory unit were documented and evaluated for their eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in the *Final Archaeological Resource Report in Support of the John Muir National Historic Site and Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site Project, Contra Costa County, California* prepared by PaleoWest in 2021. The report determined the olive orchard and olive row eligible for the NRHP; the old road cut and shed were determined ineligible. The report received concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on June 14, 2023.

Concurrence Eligibility

Status

Eligible – SHPO Consensus Determination

Date

06/14/2023

Narrative

The California SHPO concurred with the findings of the *Archaeological Resource Report*. No additional resources were evaluated in the completion of this CLI.

National Register Significance Level

Local, State

National Register Significance -- Contributing/Individual

Individual

National Register Classification

Site

Statement of Significance

In 2021 PaleoWest, LLC identified that the property was significance under National Register of Historic Places Criteria A, B, and C. While SHPO concurred with this evaluation, limited information was provided to support eligibility under B and C.

West Hills Farm is locally significant under National Register Criterion A for its associations with events that have contributed to the broad patterns of U.S. history within the context of agricultural, and by extension economic, development in Contra Costa County. The period of significance for the West Hills Farm historic site begins in 1881 when the Swett Family acquired the Alhambra Valley property, and ends in 1889, the earliest confirmed date of the olive orchard on the Swett Family land. West Hills Farm, constituting forty-four acres of the historic 185-acre Hill Girt Ranch property, contains within its boundary an olive orchard that remain from the Swett Family's operation of orchards and vineyards in upper Alhambra Valley that lasted near eight decades from the 1880s through the 1960s.

West Hills Farm is significant as a representative agricultural property in in Alhambra Valley and is significant for experimental agriculture in California. The orchard being of the olive variety specifically points to the early agricultural period in the region, a period characterized by experimental plantings of wide-ranging varieties of crops. This period coincided with the "olive oil bubble" in California, from around 1875 to beginning of World War I, when orchardists and entrepreneurs optimistically participated in the newly developing olive industry. Ranchers in Alhambra Valley were likely influenced by the popularity of olives in the late-nineteenth century and incorporated them into their orchards and vineyards. The extant olive orchard and row planted by the Swett Family is representative of early crop experimentation in the Alhambra Valley in the 1880s and 1890s.

The 2021 evaluation notes "The Swett Olive Orchard is regionally significant as a historic site under NRHP Criterion B for its direct association with the Swett Family who undertook early agricultural endeavors on their property in the Alhambra Valley and led to Frank Swett's active life as a significant horticulturist at the local and state level." Additionally, the 2021 evaluation

states “The Swett Olive Orchard is also significant under NRHP Criterion C as a good representation of a now rare property type (olive orchard in Alhambra Valley).”

Historic Context

Early Agriculture in Alhambra Valley

Although portions of the rich and fertile lands of Alhambra Valley were cultivated by Spanish missions and Mexican rancheros, it was not until the influx of post-gold rush settlers in the 1850s that the landscape of the valley was dramatically changed. Inspired by promoters such as Andrew Jackson Downing, Dr. John Strentzel and like-minded farmers embraced the golden age of pomology in post-Gold Rush California and helped transition the state’s economic basis from mining to crops. Where acreage devoted to fruit and grain production was initially small compared to that devoted to grazing, these post-gold rush settlers began to transform the landscape of Alhambra Valley.¹

This period of early agricultural development from the mid-to-late-nineteenth century was characterized by the planting of a diverse range of crops, encouraged by the State Board of Agriculture so far as to award prizes for farms that had the widest variety of products. These endorsements were based on a need to identify successful crops in the California soil and climate. American settlers did not have any preexisting knowledge of Californian agriculture: they knew from the history of Alta California that the lands were suitable for cattle, but no information was available on what would grow best in the state. During this early period of agriculture, California became a big experiment station in which new farmers would test the cuttings of grapes, plums, and other fruits that they had brought with them from the eastern states and other cuttings that they would eventually import from abroad.² Under the Morrill Act of 1862 that established land grants and land-grant colleges throughout the United States, the University of California was founded and by 1869, a new College of Agriculture was established in Berkeley to support the

¹ National Park Service, “John Muir National Historic Site Cultural Landscape Inventory,” U.S. Department of the Interior, 2004, Part 1 p.32.

² Baum, “Frank T. Swett California Agricultural Cooperatives [oral history interview],” p.1-2.

new Californian farmers.³ Once the suitable crops were identified for the state, the focus of the “experiment” shifted to agricultural sciences concerning diseases, pest infestations, and economic productivity.⁴

Development of the Olive Industry in California

One of the crops that was tested in California during this experimental period was the olive. Amidst the state-endorsed agricultural experimentation and education, two American entrepreneurs, Ellwood Cooper and Frank Kimball, simultaneously but separately sought to commercialize olive oil in California. Recognizing the development of the new state and its “cosmopolitan diet,” both men deemed the establishment of an olive oil market in California to be lucrative. Both men quickly collected thousands of cuttings from the neglected olive orchards within the abandoned mission grounds across the state and each established their private orchards comprising the Mission variety. By 1871, olives were pressed for the first time on a commercial scale in California.⁵

Around the same time that the first two private olive orchards were planted, Frederick Pohndorff collected and sent specimens of olive trees commonly grown in Spain, none of them the Mission type, to San Francisco. This marked the beginning of a rush to plant and evaluate additional varieties of olives in the young state. By 1874, the European commercial varieties Manzanillo, Nevadillo, and Sevillano arrived in California, and hundreds of additional foreign olive varieties were imported and planted in the following years. Production from these plantings resulted in an olive oil “bubble” in the late-nineteenth century that would continue until World War I.⁶

³ University of California, Davis, Foundation Plant Services and National Park Service, DOI Region 10, Cultural Resources Program, “Genetic Analysis and History of the Mount Wanda Olive Orchard at John Muir National Historic Site,” Cooperative Agreement P20AC00781, April 1, 2021, p.12; Alonzo et al, *Final Archaeological Resource Report*, p.18.

⁴ John Muir National Historic Site CLI, Part 1 p.32.

⁵ UC Davis Foundation Plant Services and NPS, “Genetic Analysis and History of the Mount Wanda Olive Orchard,” p.12, 18.

Olive orchards had been planted across California on mission grounds during the Spanish period and abandoned with the secularization under the Mexican Republic in 1821. Evidence suggests that the Franciscans grew only one olive variety at the missions, known by later entrepreneurs as the “Mission” variety.

⁶ Ibid., p.18.

This period of the oil “bubble” in California corresponds to the “Golden Age” of historic orchards, characterized by the production of a diverse variety of olives within individual, and across numerous, orchards. These earlier, more diverse orchards were experimental, to determine the characteristics of an olive variety and the quality of its fruit. The reports of multi-variety orchards are prominent in the newspapers throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century.⁷

Starting in 1875, many farmers and other entrepreneurs planted dozens of olive orchards throughout California, excited to participate in the speculative industry. However, with no preexisting knowledge of successfully growing these trees, they turned to the only books available, imported and almost completely outdated by centuries, for help with their new ventures. In response to the farmers’ difficulties, the College of Agriculture at the University of California and the newly established state boards of agriculture and horticulture published scientific research papers on the olive tree, the olive varieties, and their temperaments thereby contributing to the development of a strong olive culture in California.⁸

The Swett Family and Hill Girt Ranch

The Swett Family began their Hill Girt Ranch orchard and vineyard operations in Alhambra Valley precisely during this period of diverse and experimental agriculture in California. Adhering to the planting practices of the era, and likely influenced by close friend John Muir and his father-in-law John Strentzel, John and Frank Swett began to improve the 185-acre land at least by 1883, planting the fertile land with a wide range of fruit trees and vines which included pears, grapes, and plums from cuttings from the neighboring Muir-Strentzel orchards.⁹ Tomato vines were observed on the Swett property in an 1889 article of Alhambra Valley, and ranch records from 1891-1892 also identify cherries and apricots as their fruit-yielding crops.¹⁰ Also observed

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ UC Davis Foundation Plant Services and NPS, “Genetic Analysis and History of the Mount Wanda Olive Orchard,” p.18-19.

⁹ Sutter, “John Muir and the John Swett Family,” p.22.

¹⁰ “Alhambra Valley,” *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. 37 No. 2, January 12, 1889; “Day Book – Hill Girt Farm & Hill Girt Winery, 1891-1892,” *John Swett and Son records, 1888-1919*, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, BANC MSS 99-175c, Box 1, v.13, p.110.

on the property in 1889 were olive trees.¹¹ The Swett Family's Hill Girt Ranch as planted through the late-nineteenth century embodied the early agricultural patterns of crop diversity.

In addition to vineyard and orchard plantings, the Swett Family also appears to have grown eucalyptus trees on their Hill Girt Ranch property. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and into the turn of the twentieth century, eucalyptus trees rose in popularity as windbreaks throughout California to shelter newly planted fruit trees from wind damage and to prevent blowing soil. In the 1902 treatise *Eucalyptus Cultivated in the United States*, horticulturist Alfred J. McClatchie noted that orchardists in Southern California had planted rows of blue gum eucalyptus for precisely these reasons, and, five years later, the California State Board of Forestry produced a report endorsing the use of the blue gum eucalyptus, describing it as a perfect windbreak tree for its strong root system, flexible trunk, and foliage that redirected wind upwards, ideal for crop protection. In a 1958 interview, Helen Muir, daughter of John Muir, recalled that John Swett Sr. provided about a dozen different varieties of eucalyptus trees to her father and helped plant the trees on the lower slope of the Muir House.¹²

National Register Significance Criteria

Criterion A: Event

Criterion B: Person

Criterion C: Design/Construction

National Register Periods of Significance (with Historic Context Themes)

Start Year/Era and End Year/Era	Historic Context Theme	Subtheme	Facet
1881 CE – 1889 CE	Developing the American Economy	Agriculture	Large-Scale Commercial Agriculture (Crops, Orchards)

National Register Areas of Significance

Category	Subcategory	Narrative
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¹¹ "Alhambra Valley."

¹² "Swett Family Olive Orchard" DPR Form, p.5.

	(only for Archeology and Ethnic Heritage)	
Agriculture		

National Historic Landmark

Status

No

World Heritage Site

Status

No

National Natural Landmark

Status

No

State Register Documentation

Identification Number

18-336-04

18-336-05

18-336-06

Name

Swett Family Olive Orchard

Shed

Old Road Cut

Chronology & Physical History

Chronology

Start Year	Start Era	End Year	End Era	Major Event	Major Event Description
500	CE	500	CE	Inhabited	Linguistic evidence suggests that the ancestors of the Ohlone arrived in the San Francisco Bay around 500 CE, having moved south and west from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.
1821	CE	1821	CE	Established	Mexico achieved independence from the Spanish Monarchy and Alta California became a part of the newly established Mexican Republic.
1823	CE	1823	CE	Granted	In as early as 1823, Ignacio Martinez was reportedly granted a place called El Pinole comprising some three leagues.
1837	CE	1837	CE	Granted	Martinez expanded his land grant to include an additional league in his new land petition in 1837 to comprise three leagues of Cañada del Pinole and one called "La Hambre."
1848	CE	1848	CE	Established	The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed, ending the Mexican-American War. California became a part of the United States.
1869	CE	1869	CE	Established	A new College of Agriculture was established in Berkeley to inform and educate farmers of the west about the nature of their soil and how it would work best for them.
1871	CE	1871	CE	Established	By 1871, olives were pressed for the first time on a commercial scale in California.
1874	CE	1874	CE	Established	European commercial varieties of olives arrived in California: Manzanillo, Nevadillo, and Sevillano. This marked the beginning of the rush to plant and evaluate additional olive varieties in the state.
1875	CE	1914	CE	Established	The period of the olive oil "bubble" extended from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of World War I.

1881	CE	1881	CE	Purchased	John Swett purchased the 185-acre Hill Girt Ranch property for \$7,000 in 1881.
1883	CE	1883	CE	Planted	John Swett planted wine grapes on his newly acquired ranch.
1885	CE	1886	CE	Planted	John Swett's son Frank Swett acquired pear cuttings from John Muir's orchards and grape and plum stock from both Muir and Strentzel for the family farm.
1889	CE	1889	CE	Established	Portions of the Swett property were reported to have been planted with olive trees.
1890	CE	1890	CE	Established	Frank T. Swett assumed management of the Hill Girt Ranch.
1893	CE	1893	CE	Built	By 1893, the Hill Girt Ranch House was built north of the Altamirano Adobe.
1914	CE	1914	CE	Established	In January 1914, John Swett & Son advertised "Bartlett Pears, French Prunes, Mission Olives, Formosa Plums, Walnuts on California Black" in the <i>Pacific Rural Press</i> .
1969	CE	1969	CE	Established	Frank T. Swett continued to operate the Hill Girt Ranch with the help of his daughter Margaret Plummer until his death in Spring of 1969.
1969	CE	2015	CE	Purchased	Sometime after 1969, West Hills Farm purchased the forty-four-acre property.
2015	CE	2015	CE	Purchased	The John Muir Land Trust purchased the West Hills Farm property.
2015	CE	2015	CE	Land Transfer	The John Muir Land Trust donated the West Hills Farm property to the John Muir National Historic Site.
2018	CE	2018	CE	Established	On June 25, 2018, the John Muir National Historic Site was officially expanded to include the donated West Hills Farm parcel.

Physical History

The following section provides information on the physical development and evolution of the site, organized by time periods, to assess the historical integrity of the site. This is not an exhaustive history or historic context of the area.

Early San Francisco Bay Area and Contra Costa County

The upper Alhambra Valley in Contra Costa County is within the region occupied by the Ohlone or Costanoan ethnolinguistic group of Native Americans at the time of European contact. Ethnolinguistic evidence suggests that the ancestors of the Ohlone arrived in the San Francisco Bay Area around 500 CE from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.¹³ They lived in one or more permanent villages and numerous smaller campsites used as needed during seasonal resource exploitation.¹⁴ They constructed domed structures thatched with tule, grass, wild alfalfa, or ferns and semi-subterranean sweathouses were built into pits excavated in stream banks. Staples in the Ohlone diet in the Bay Area included acorns of the coast live oak, valley oak, tanbar oak, and California black oak, seeds, berries, roots and grasses. Animal proteins were consumed through mussels and meat of deer, elk, grizzly, rabbit, and squirrel. Careful management of the land through controlled burning served to support a plentiful, reliable source of sustenance.¹⁵ There are no physical remains of this period that have been identified within the West Hills Farm site.

Spanish Alta California

The post-European contact history of Contra Costa County region began in 1772 with the second Fages-Crespi expedition that traveled from Monterey through what are now Milpitas, San Lorenzo, Oakland, and Berkeley to reach the area of modern-day Pinole. From Pinole, the expedition traveled through present-day Rodeo and Crockett to Martinez. A similar expedition was made through the region in 1776, the Anza-Font expedition, that traveled through the Contra

¹³ Christina Alonso, Roberta Thomas, Ashley Schmutzler, Kimm Johnson, Chandra Miller, and Zackary Babineau, *Final Archaeological Resource Report in Support of the John Muir National Historic Site and Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site Project, Contra Costa County, California*, prepared for the National Park Service by PaleoWest, 2021, p.11.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.12.

Costa County area trading with residents of the local villages encountered along the way. The presence of Europeans in Alta California, however, would not significantly impact the ways of life of the local native peoples until the establishment of Spanish missions.¹⁶ The first mission was established in San Diego in 1769, with the first mission in the San Francisco Bay Area, Mission San Francisco de Asís, established in 1776, followed by Mission Santa Clara de Asís in 1777, and Mission San Jose in 1797. The ensuing Mission era proved to be catastrophic to the native peoples of the region, who were brought to the mission as conscripts for labor under the guise of Christianization and saving of souls. These missions became the loci of native missionization, which brought disease and subjugation to the native Californian groups. The Ohlone peoples of the Contra Costa County region would not be an exception.¹⁷ There are no physical remains of this period that have been identified within the West Hills Farm site.

The Mexican Republic, California Statehood, and Rancho El Pinole

The following Rancho Period history is adapted from “Genetic Analysis and History of the Mount Wanda Olive Orchard at John Muir National Historic Site,” 2021.¹⁸ The citations from the original document are included.

When Mexico achieved independence from the Spanish monarchy in 1821, Alta California became a part of the newly established Mexican Republic. Under Mexican rule, the Spanish colonial policies that restricted landownership and foreign trade were lifted: trade between Californians and foreigners were allowed, governors were encouraged to make more land grants for individual ranchos, and foreigners, once naturalized and converted to Catholicism, could hold land in the province.¹⁹ In an effort to populate its distant territories such as Alta California, the Mexican government granted and distributed lands liberally through the 1820s and 1830s, allowing individuals to apply for and receive tracts of land ranging from a league square

¹⁶ Ibid., p.15.

¹⁷ UC Davis Foundation Plant Services and NPS, “Genetic Analysis and History of the Mount Wanda Olive Orchard,” p.15.

¹⁸ UC Davis Foundation Plant Services and NPS, “Genetic Analysis and History of the Mount Wanda Olive Orchard,” p.14-15.

¹⁹ “Mexican California,” from *California as I Saw It: First-Person Narratives of California’s Early Years, 1849 to 1900* Collection, Library of Congress, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/articles-and-essays/early-california-history/mexican-california/>.

(approximately 4,428 acres) to eleven leagues square (nearly 50,000 acres).²⁰ Some fifty grants were issued for large ranchos before 1834, and, upon secularization of the California missions in 1834, an additional 600 grants were made.²¹

The study site, West Hills Farm, was claimed as a part of one of such land grants: Rancho el Pinole. In as early as 1823, Ignacio Martinez was reportedly granted a place called El Pinole comprising some three leagues (*sitios*). In 1834, Martinez claimed that he had lost his title papers to his land and solicited a renewal of title. When insufficient evidence of his claims required him to petition anew in 1837, he expanded his land grant to include an additional league. In the new petition, Martinez described the land as “three *sitios*, which are ‘Cañada del Pinole,’ and that which is called ‘La Hambre,’ straits of Carquinez, running towards the ‘Mar de la Norte,’ that is called Bay of Sonoma, adjoining the mouth of the same Cañada del Pinole.”²² West Hills Farm, located immediately west-southwest of Cañada del Hambre, was situated at the eastern border of the said land grant, south of Mount Wanda.

Most of the land grant petitions made during the Mexican rule of California included graphic representations, *diseños*, of the land to show its shape and position, with reference to neighboring tracts, natural objects, and developments. These *diseños* often depicted houses, orchards and/or agricultural fields, and corral present on the rancho land. One such *diseño* of Rancho el Pinole dating to the 1840s depicts the extent of the land grant, including Cañada del Hambre, immediately west of which the study site of Swett Ranch is located.²³ This map labels Cañada del Pinole at the western boundary of the rancho where an encinal (oak grove) and two structures are demarcated by a stand of trees and two polygons. Contrasting the development in the western

²⁰ J.P. Munro-Fraser, *History of Contra Costa County, California: Including Its Geography, Geology, Topography, Climatology and Description; Together with a Record of the Mexican Grants ... Also, Incidents of Pioneer Life; and Biographical Sketches of Early and Prominent Settlers and Representative Men* (San Francisco: W.A. Slocum & Company, 1882), p.255.

²¹ “Mexican California”.

²² Munro-Fraser, *History of Contra Costa County*, p.329.

²³ This *diseño* likely dates to the early 1840s as a correspondence from the Governor to the Prefect, dated June 1, 1842, stated that a grant had been issued to Martinez for El Pinole. This was likely in association with Martinez’s re-petition for El Pinole in the late-1830s after claiming that he had lost his title papers to his 1823 land grant.

(F.A. Hyde, William A. Piper, and Aaron Augustus Sargent, *In the Matter of the Survey of the Rancho “El Sobrante,” Castro Confirmees: Brief*, (United States Department of Justice: Central law and job print (W. Hughes’), 1889), p.49; Munro-Fraser, *History of Contra Costa County*, p.329)

portion of the Rancho el Pinole, only the natural geographical and topographical forms are depicted in the eastern end of the land grant (see Physical History 1). This suggests that there were no purposeful improvements, including an olive orchard, made in the study site, immediately west of Cañada del Hambre, by the early 1840s.

In 1851, a year after California officially entered the Union as the thirty first state of the United States, the U.S. government passed the California Land Act of 1851 that established the Board of Commissioners to ascertain and settle the private land claims in the new state.²⁴ This legislation was enacted to uphold the articles of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 that ended the Mexican-American War and which stipulated the protection of property and civil rights of Mexican nationals living within the new boundaries of the United States.²⁵ The title confirmation process required the landowners to present to the board their title papers and other evidence of ownership. Upon finding the surveys of land grants during the Spanish and Mexican era lacking the precision necessary to confirm or reject these claims, the ranchos began to re-survey their landholdings while new petitioners, too, began to scope available lands.²⁶

Three known boundary surveys from the early years of California statehood were executed in the area of Rancho el Pinole: plats dating 1857, March 1860, and December 1860. Like the *diseño* dating to the early 1840s, these three plats, too, suggest that the Mount Wanda olive orchard post-dates the mid-nineteenth century. While all depicting or describing improvements along the boundary of Rancho el Pinole, they exclude the mention of an orchard or an agricultural field in the vicinity of Mount Wanda. Of particular interest are the “Plat of the Rancho del Pinole, 1857” and the “Plat of the Rancho Cañada del Hambre de las Bolsas, March 1860” in which a house is depicted immediately south of the present-day olive orchard (see Physical History 2 and 3). This house, labeled “Abelino” or “Abellino House,” refers to the adobe built by Don Abelino Altamirano, husband of Doña Encarnación Martínez and son-in-law of Ignacio Martínez, circa 1849.²⁷ The representation of this particular building aids in more accurately locating the site of

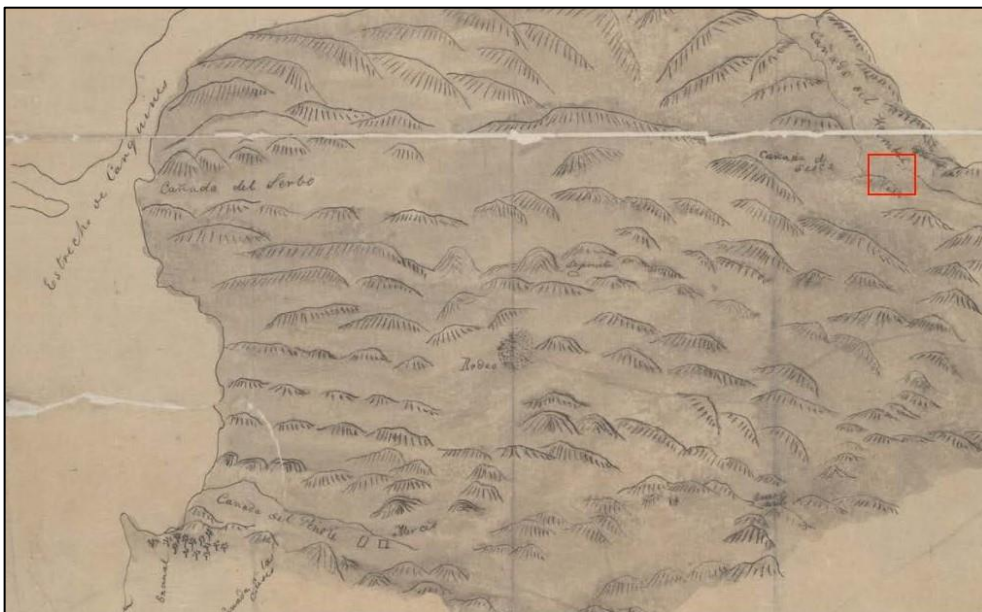
²⁴ Section 1, California Land Act of 1851.

²⁵ Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), Articles VIII-IX.

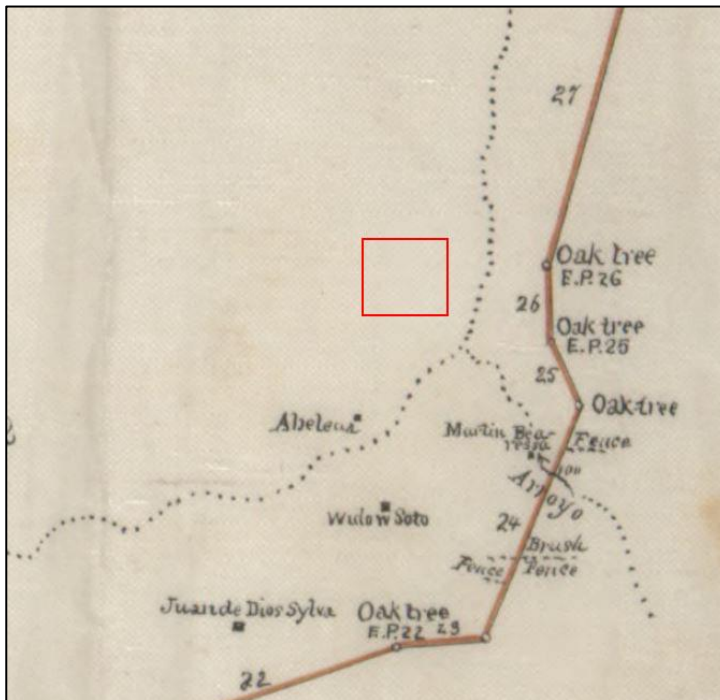
²⁶ Paul Gates, “The California Land Act of 1851,” *California Historical Quarterly*, December 1971, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Dec. 1971), p.396-399.

²⁷ Marion Randall Parsons, *Old California Houses*, (California: University of California Press, 1952), p.33-34. This adobe was restored by John Swett’s family and is extant today.

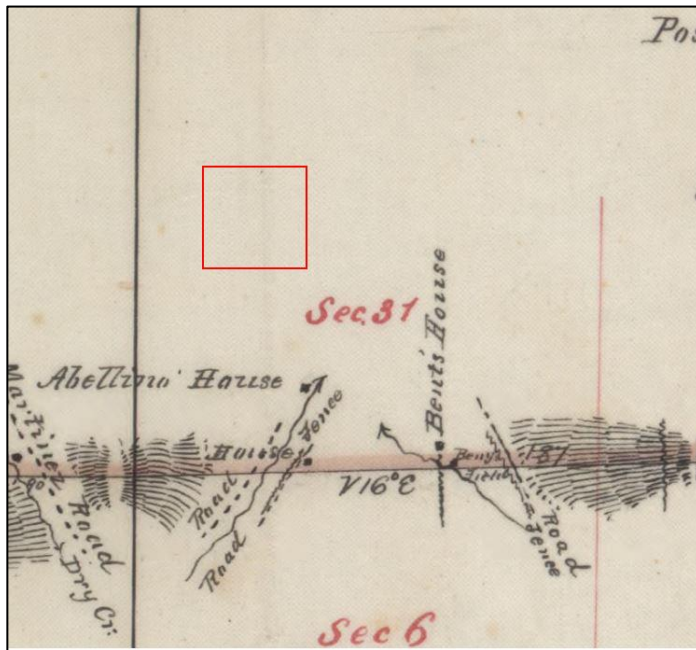
the olive grove within the plats: immediately west-northwest of the confluence of Arroyo del Hambre. Though an argument could be made that these two plats, with the exception of houses, only represent development bisected by the property boundary line and therefore the status olive grove cannot be confirmed, the third plat of the area, “Plat of Rancho Pinole, December 1860,” further supports the claim that an olive grove was not extant at this time. This plat depicts numerous agricultural fields, both those bisected by the property line and those fully intact and within the boundary. This plat depicts a large field immediately south of the confluence of Arroyo del Hambre but not one immediately west-northwest of it, where the olive grove stands today (see Physical History 3). The *diseño* and three plats of the area ranging from the early 1840s to 1860 suggest that the olive orchard on West Hills Farm post-dates the Mexican Land Grant era and the early years of California statehood.



Physical History #1. Crop of “Diseño del Rancho Pinole: California,” U.S. District Court. California, Northern District. Land case 205 ND, page 670; land case map D-450 (Bancroft Library), circa 1840s. Approximate study area marked in red.



Physical History #2. Crop of "Plat of the Rancho del Pinole, California, finally confirmed to Maria Antonia Martinez de Richardson, & al., containing 29,039 42/100 acres /surveyed under the direction of the U.S. Surveyor General by Andrew J. Coffee, Depy. Surveyor, 1857," U.S. District Court. California, Northern District. Land case 205 ND, page 674; land case map E-454 (Bancroft Library). Approximate study area marked in red.



Physical History #3. Crop of "Plat of the Rancho Cañada del Hambre de las Bolsas, California, finally confirmed to Teodora Soto / surveyed under instructions from the U.S. Surveyor General by A.W. Von Schmidt, Dep. Surr., March 1860," U.S. District Court. California, North District. Land case 308 ND, page 434; land case map E-617 (Bancroft Library). Approximate study area is marked in red.

John Swett and Frank Tracy Swett, Hill Girt Ranch

Although little is known about the study site of the olive orchard during the two-decade period between the publishing of the December 1860 "Plat of Rancho Pinole" and the purchase of the land in Alhambra Valley in 1881 by John Swett, it is likely that the 185-acre tract of land, which includes the present-day forty-four-acre West Hills Farm parcel, was only minimally cultivated, if at all. An article in the *Pacific Rural Press* from January 1889 titled "Alhambra Valley" describes the highly cultivated lands of John Swett and recalls the evergreen trees that once covered the hills entirely, large areas of which were removed for said cultivation.²⁸ This suggests that prior to the Swett Family's improvements on the 185-acre land, the hills that bound the valley floor were likely left uncultivated. It is possible that the one-mile-wide valley floor was minimally cultivated, through likely not on a commercial scale.

²⁸ "Alhambra Valley," *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. 37 No. 2, January 12, 1889.

In 1881, John Swett, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction,²⁹ purchased the 185 acres of land in Alhambra Valley for \$7,000. Swett, at the time based in San Francisco, became acquainted with the region through his friend John Muir with whom he had developed a close relationship since the 1870s. Muir had moved to the valley in 1880 upon marrying Louie Wanda Strentzel, daughter of the established gentleman farmer and orchardist John Strentzel, and when his dear friend expressed an interest in buying farmland where he could eventually retire, introduced him to the tract of land adjoining his father-in-law's orchards to the south.³⁰

The 185-acre tract of land purchased by John Swett was the shape of an irregular polygon and comprised the portion of the Alhambra Valley where the valley is approximately one mile wide. The property included the foothills of Franklin Ridge to the north, west, and southwest, and was bounded by the present-day Alhambra Valley Road to the east (see Physical History 4). Mrs. Mary Louise Swett named the property "Hill Girt Ranch" as it was girdled by hills much like the descriptions of her husband's childhood home in New Hampshire. Also within this land tract was the Altamirano adobe from circa 1849, which served as the first house in the valley for the new property owners.³¹

Through the remainder of the decade upon purchase of the Alhambra Valley property, the Swett Family Ranch, or the "Hill Girt Ranch," was inhabited part time. John Swett and Mary Louise Swett continued to reside in San Francisco where the former pressed on in his fight for an improved public education system. During this time, John Swett likely worked there as a secondary investment for retirement; as he continued his work in public education, the fruit of his new land was not his primary source of livelihood. In 1883, he was improving his farm, reportedly planting wine grapes among other fruits and trees.³² Alongside his father, since as early as 1885, son Frank Tracy Swett was spending weekends at the Alhambra Valley property planting fruit trees from cuttings acquired from the neighboring Strentzel orchards.³³ By 1889, the Hill Girt Ranch was reported to have been planted with "the choicest vines, deciduous fruits and

²⁹ John Swett is considered the founder of the California's statewide public school system.

³⁰ Sutter, "John Muir and the John Swett Family," p.21.

³¹ Ibid., p.23.

³² Baum, "Frank T. Swett California Agricultural Cooperatives [oral history interview]," p.66.

³³ Sutter, "John Muir and the John Swett Family," p.22.

olive trees.”³⁴ Although there are no records that specifically indicate the planting date of the olives, it is probable that the olives were planted by John or Frank Swett during their first decade on the Alhambra Valley property.

While father and son collaboratively worked the property through the 1880s, Frank Swett assumed primary management of the ranch in 1890 at the age of twenty-one.³⁵ Frank Swett had displayed a passion for agricultural science since an earlier age and studied horticulture at the University of California, Berkeley, while spending his weekends at the ranch. Upon taking management, turned Hill Girt Ranch into a full-time operation. At least by 1893, a new ranch house was built on the property, immediately north of the Altamirano adobe, and by the turn of the century, the family business “John Swett & Son, Martinez, California,” was marketing a range of not only wines and fruits but also draught-resistant ground cover and cuttings of various vines and trees.³⁶ For the first time in January 1914 (in available records), John Swett & Son advertised mission olives alongside grafted grapevines, Bartlett pears, French prunes, Formosa plums, and walnuts on California black.³⁷ Although more famously known for their grape (and wine) and pear production, these advertisements confirm that the olive orchard on Hill Girt Ranch was extant and producing olives through the turn of the century.

Following the 1914 advertisements, however, the olives are not mentioned in association with the ranch in any articles or advertisements available to date. This period coincides with the early years of World War I when Frank Swett became the president of the California Pear Growers Association and rallied the growers to organize and set fair prices through the canneries to the consumers, a period marked by growers in the state shifting focus to the profitable peaches and pears.³⁸ It is possible that the focus of production on Hill Girt Ranch, too, shifted to the profitable fruits of the time, away from olives.

³⁴ “Alhambra Valley.”

³⁵ Baum, “Frank T. Swett California Agricultural Cooperatives [oral history interview].” p.66.

³⁶ “Hillgirt Ranch (Swett home), May 1893,” Contra Costa County Historical Society, Image 6240; Advertisements Column 2, *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. 57, No. 5, February 4, 1899; Advertisements Column 1, *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. 65, No. 3, January 17, 1903; Advertisements Column 2, *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. 73, No. 12, March 23, 1907; Advertisements Column 2, *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. 75, No 3, January 18, 1908.

³⁷ Advertisements Column 1, *Pacific Rural Press*, Vol. 87, No. 4 and 5, January 24 and 31, 1914.

³⁸ Baum, “Frank T. Swett California Agricultural Cooperatives.” p.15-17, 27.

Frank Swett served as the director of the California Canning Peach Growers Association from 1921-1925 (Ibid., p.34).

Archival research of the “John Swett & Son” customer correspondence, account books, cellar books, and weight book has not revealed any new information on the olives.³⁹ These records largely focused on the customer correspondence and sale of the wines produces from the ranch vineyards. The Hill Girt Ranch was recorded as having produced claret, sherry, port, brandy, sauterne, white wine (variety unspecified), and angelica as some of the most popular varieties, but also recorded sales of vinegar and grape juice.⁴⁰ These records appear to document only the winery operation (referred to as the Hill Girt Wines or Hill Girt Winery)⁴¹ and, as the Hill Girt Ranch is also known to have produced numerous fruits, it is likely that the orchard production records were kept separately and have not yet been located (or donated). One record book, “Day Book – Hill Girt Farm and Hill Girt Winery, 1891-1892,” includes a page titled “Return from Crops” that documents the yield of not only grapes but also other fruits such as cherries, apricots, prunes, and pears, does not include olives in its list, which suggests that olives were not harvested, or at least did not yield commercial-scale returns.⁴² However, as this is the only document of its kind in the available records and it dates to a very early period of the Hill Girt Ranch operation, it neither confirms nor disproves the presence or purpose of the olive orchard in the scheme of the eight-decade operation.

The first graphic documentation of the Hill Girt Ranch olives available to date is the 1939 aerial photograph. The aerial image captures the entirety of Hill Girt Ranch, dotted with orchards and vineyards. The olive orchard, bisected by a road, and a long row of olives following the natural topography are shown on the southern slopes of the foothills that define the ranch’s northern boundary. The grid pattern of the orchard and the linear alignment of the olive row are clearly visible (see Physical History 5).⁴³ The olives visible in this aerial photograph are likely the olives

³⁹ *John Swett and Son records, 1888-1919*, BANC MSS 99/175c, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

The entire collection was consulted at the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁴⁰ “Marinez account books 1901-1916” and “Account books, 1888-1901,” *John Swett and Son records, 1888-1919*, BANC MSS 99-175c, v.3-6, 11-15, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁴¹ “Hill Girt Wines Advertisement Leaflet,” *John Swett and Son records, 1888-1919*, BANC MSS 99-175c, v.12, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

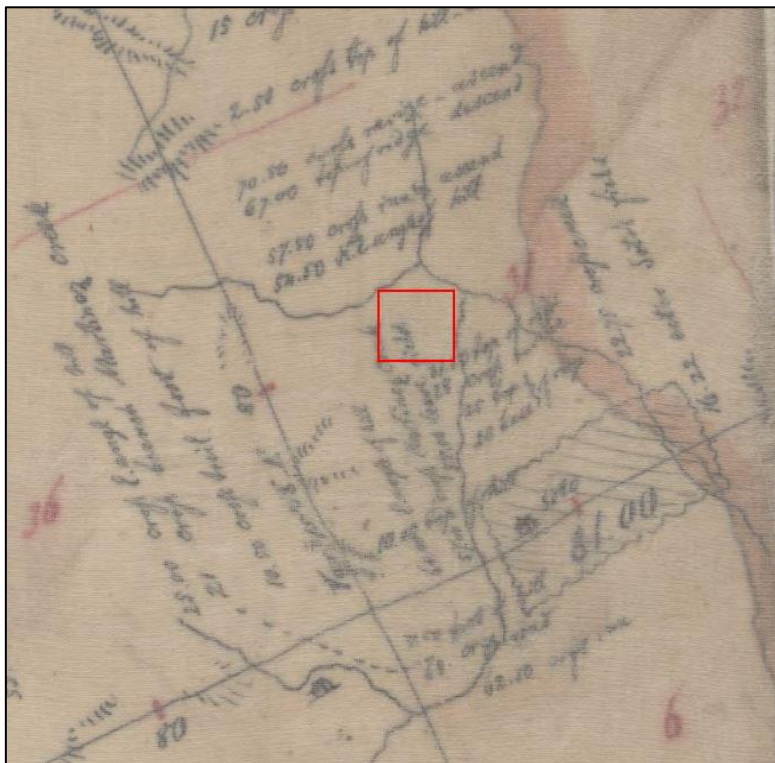
⁴² “Day Book – Hill Girt Farm & Hill Girt Winery, 1891-1892,” *John Swett and Son records, 1888-1919*, BANC MSS 99-175c, Box 1, v.13, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, p.110.

The fact that the record book differentiates Hill Girt Farm from Hill Girt Winery suggests that records for the orchard operations were kept separately from the vineyard operations.

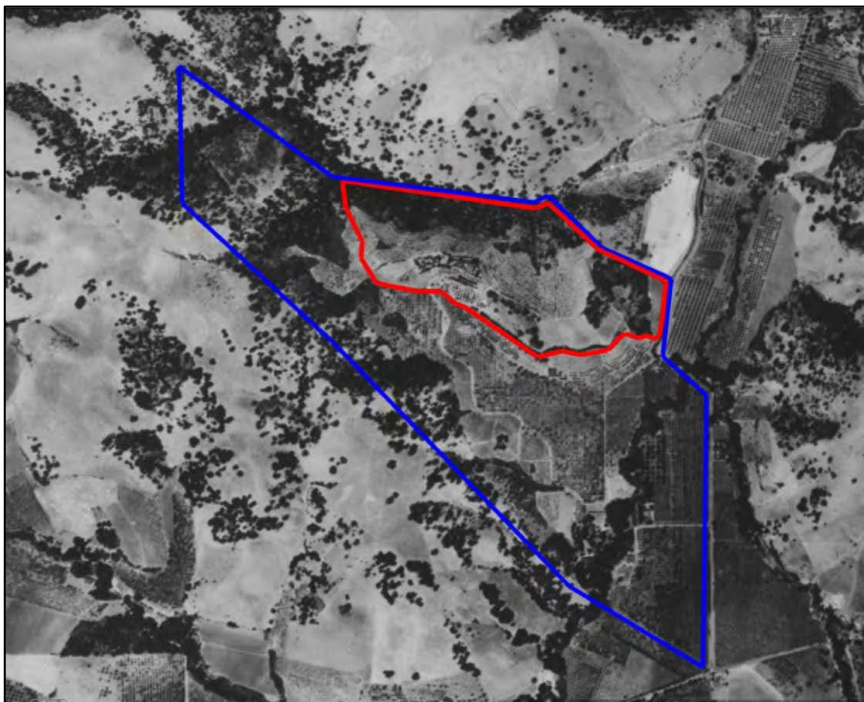
⁴³ Aerial Photograph, Flight C-5750, Frame 280-107, January 1, 1939.

established by John and Frank Swett between 1881 and 1889. While there are no records specific to the olives until, and since, the 1914 advertisements by John Swett & Son, there is also no evidence to indicate that the Swetts removed the 1880s olive orchard. With focus of production shifted to more profitable products such as peaches, pears, and grapes, it is likely that the olives were lesser tended to, rather than efforts expended to wholly remove the established trees. However, the characteristically thrifty olive trees persisted through the century.

Following the 1939 aerial imagery, the planting site has been photographed once every decade through the 1960s and sporadically thereafter. These aerial photographs show the olive orchard and row in the same location and planting pattern and confirm that the olives have not been removed or newly organized in recent years (see Physical History 6-9).



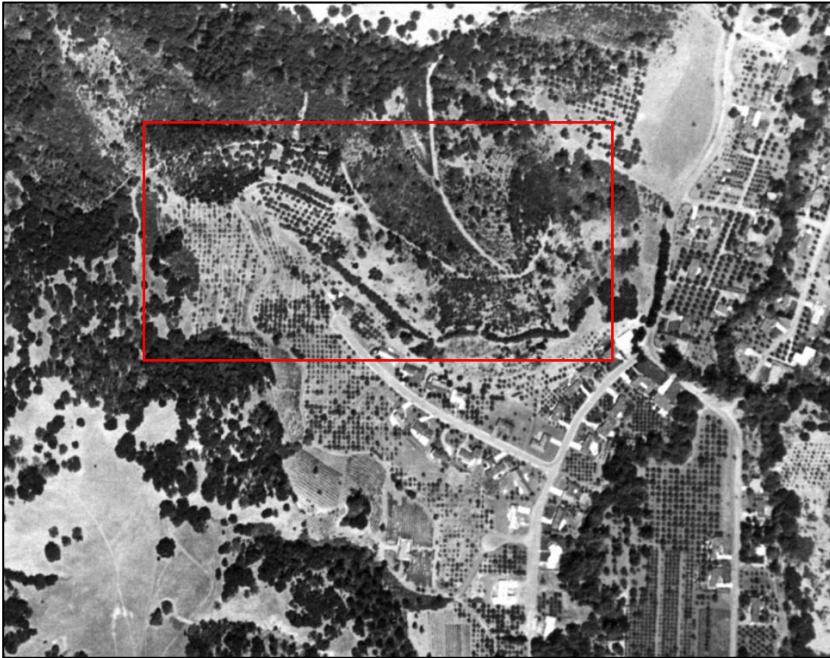
Physical History #4. Crop of "Plat of the Rancho Pinole, California," 1860, U.S. District Court. California, Northern District. Land case 205 ND, page 672; land case map E-452 (Bancroft Library). Approximate study area is marked in red. Note the hatched polygons in the adjacent lands that represent agricultural fields.



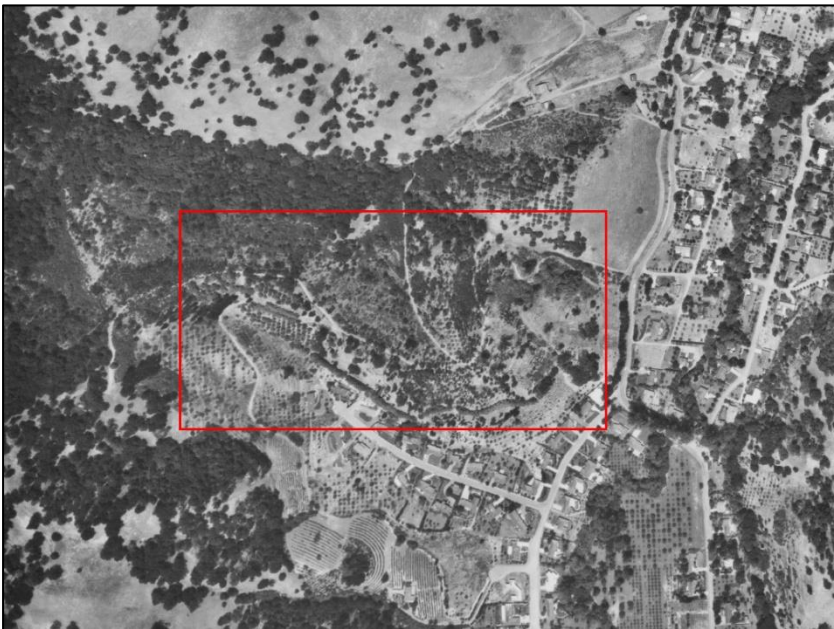
Physical History #5. Overlay of 44-acre West Hills Farms parcel (red) with the larger historical boundary of 185-acre Hill Girt Ranch (blue) on 1939 aerial. Note olive trees and olive tree row along south edge of current boundary of 44-acre West Hills. From "Swett Family Olive Orchard" DPR Form, 2/26/2021.



Physical History #6. Crop of aerial photograph captured on September 6, 1946, Flight GS-CP-5-106 (Earth Explorer Entity ID AR1CP0000050106). General study site marked in red.



Physical History #7. Crop of aerial photograph captured on January 1, 1958, Flight BUU-1958, Frame 6v-201. General study site marked in red.



Physical History #8. Crop of aerial photograph captured on May 1, 1965, Flight CAS-65-130, Frame 28-23. General study site marked in red.



Physical History #9. Crop of aerial photograph captured on October 28, 1980, Flight S_VEZR, Frame 1-95. General study site marked in red.

West Hills Farm and John Muir National Historic Site

Simultaneously with his leadership positions in regional, and later national, agricultural organizations and agencies⁴⁴ Frank Swett continued management of the Hill Girt Farm, with the aid of his daughter Margaret Plummer, until his passing in late Spring of 1969.⁴⁵ Through the remainder of the century, the historic Hill Girt Ranch was divided and sold, most of the ranch lands now developed into residential subdivisions. The forty-four-acre parcel of land that comprises the foothills of Franklin Ridge, including the olive orchard and row, was sold to West Hills Farm. However, unlike its neighboring parcels, the land remained undeveloped. The undeveloped state of this property largely stems from the near thirty years of cooperative efforts by the State Coastal Conservancy, the John Muir Land Trust, the East Bay Regional Park District,

⁴⁴ In addition to serving as the president of the California Pear Growers Association and as director of the California Canning Peach Growers Association, Frank T. Swett served as the Horticultural Commissioner of Contra Costa County, a member of the State Agricultural Commission, and the Chief of the U.S. Farm Debt Bureau (Sutter, "John Muir and the John Swett Family," p.22).

⁴⁵ Nicholas C. Polos, *John Swett: California's Frontier Schoolmaster*, (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1978), p.164-165.

the East Bay Municipal Utility District, and other public agencies and local communities to conserve the area for open space, natural resources, watersheds, and public access.⁴⁶ In 2015, the John Muir Land Trust purchased the forty-four-acre parcel of land from West Hills Farm and donated it to the John Muir National Historic Site. On June 25, 2018, the Historic Site was officially expanded to include the donated land.⁴⁷ The park currently refers to this unit of the park as West Hills Farm Unit or the “West Forty.”

⁴⁶ “West Hills Farm Acquisition, Staff Recommendation,” State Coastal Conservancy, January 29, 2015, accessed March 11, 2024, https://scc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/sccbb/2015/1501/20150129Board12_West_Hills_Farm_Acquisition.pdf, p.4.

⁴⁷ “West Hills Farm,” John Muir Land Trust, accessed March 11, 2024, <https://jmlt.org/our-places/john-muir-national-historic-site/west-hills-farm/>.

Analysis & Evaluation

Analysis and Evaluation Summary

The West Hills Farm cultural landscape is a forty-four-acre site located on the southern slope of the Mt. Wanda formation, south of the John Muir House and bounding the west side of upper Alhambra Valley. This site is representative of the early agricultural efforts within Alhambra Valley in the late nineteenth century, particularly in orchards and vineyards, that shaped the economic development of the area as a major fruit producer in the region. The extant olive orchard is a remnant of the orchards and vineyards that proliferated on the floor and hillsides of Alhambra Valley from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. The period of significance is 1881 to 1889, beginning with the purchase of the property by John Swett, who, with his son, would develop the land into a successful agricultural operation, the Hill Girt Ranch, and ending with the earliest confirmed date of the olive orchard on the Swett Family land. West Hills Farm retains its historical integrity through four landscape characteristics, including natural systems and features, spatial organization, vegetation, and circulation.

Natural systems that have influenced the development of the olive orchard, and the larger valley, include geomorphology, hydrology, climate, and vegetation. The microclimates created by the evergreen-covered slopes and hillsides of upper Alhambra Valley offered favorable soil conditions for agriculture, especially in fruit production, while the reliable fresh water source, Alhambra Creek, enabled large-scale agricultural operations. The Mediterranean climate of warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters further facilitated successful crops.

Under such favorable conditions for agriculture presented by the natural systems, the site was planted with olive trees in the form of a terraced, gridded orchard and a long, linear row. The steep slope of the hillside likely influenced the selection of the type of fruit tree to be planted; olives, known for their thriftiness and resilience in even the worst conditions, were planted in terraced rows from the saddle of the hill progressing downslope. Circulation of through the orchard site was established in the form of road cuts that historically connected the olive orchard to the ranch core and other cultivated fields of the Hill Girt Ranch.

Integrity

The West Hills Farm cultural landscape retains historic integrity in location, design, workmanship, materials, setting, feeling, and association. The olive orchard remains in its original location on the southern slope of Mt. Wanda where the olive trees display historic integrity in design and workmanship through their terraced, gridded pattern in the orchard and linear pattern in the row. The maturity of the trees confirm that these are historic plantings. Although land use outside the cultural landscape has changed from agricultural to residential in the twentieth century, Mt. Wanda to the north of the landscape unit retains its rural and woodland setting that contributes to the historic setting of the area. Integrity in feeling and association is retained through the sense of time and place of a late-nineteenth century agricultural property created by the historic orchard.

Natural Systems and Features

Natural systems and features are defined as the natural aspects that have influenced the development and physical form of a landscape. The geomorphology, hydrology, climate, and vegetation have influenced the development of the site.

Geomorphology

The lower bedrock layers of Mount Wanda, rising 660 feet, are composed of sandstone that was slowly deposited by the inland ocean covering this area some fourteen million years ago. Above this is the “Great Valley Sequence,” an older profile of siltstone and shale; this incongruity is attributed to the San Andreas Fault which tilted up and overturned the rocks twenty to thirty million years ago. Several other faults traverse the area, generally from a southerly to northwesterly direction.⁴⁸ The flat or gently sloping lands of the upper Alhambra Valley floors and the lower hillsides provided arable and fertile parcels, alongside the Arroyo del Hambre. The slopes and aspects of the surrounding landforms also influenced microclimates for an increased variety of fruit production.⁴⁹

The olive orchard is located on the steep southern slopes of the foothills of Mt. Wanda, south of the summit, between approximately 400 and 500 feet above sea level. Consistent with the historically determined character of the fruit trees, namely the thriftiness that enabled the trees to grow on even the worst lands, the olives were planted on the terraced steep hillside of the valley.

Hydrology

There is no fresh water located within the site. The closest fresh water source is the Alhambra Creek that flows through the valley to the east of the olive orchard and the intermittent Strentzel Creek drains the southern portion of Mt. Wanda to the north in the Alhambra Creek watershed. This availability of fresh water in the region, including Franklin Creek to the north of the John Muir House and Arroyo del Hambre along the east boundary of the Gravesite unit, presented

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

favorable conditions for flourishing agriculture in the valley lands. However, olives could thrive in this site without a fresh water source, as evidenced by the lack of irrigation to the site.

Climate

The cultural landscape is located within the Briones Bioregion, characterized by a Mediterranean climate of warm and dry summers and cool and damp winters. The average minimum temperature is fifty-seven degrees and the average maximum temperature is ninety-two degrees. Average annual rainfall ranges between sixteen and twenty inches, 90% of which occurs from November to April.⁵⁰ The climate varies considerably within the park and causes a variety of microclimates, which accounts for varied plant communities. According to the Sunset Western Garden Book, the park straddles “Zone 14: Inland Area with Some Ocean Influence” and “Zone 15: Chilly Winters along the Coast Range.” Due to marine air that spills inland from the breach in the Coastal Ranges created by the San Francisco and San Pablo bays, both zones offer long growing seasons, and combined with the terrain, ideal conditions for many orchard, vineyard, and specimen plants.⁵¹ This temperate climate has facilitated large-scale agricultural production across the region throughout history and continues to support the longevity of the historic olives.

Native Vegetation

The slopes of Mount Wanda and the hills bounding Alhambra Valley are woodland areas that include valley oak (*Quercus lobate*), coast live oak (*Q. agrifolia*), blue oak (*Q. douglasii*), black oak (*Q. kelloggii*), California buckeye (*Aesculus californica*), and California bay (*Umbellularia californica*), among others.⁵² The oak and laurel woodlands were historically cleared in targeted areas for agriculture, including the olive orchard site, as evidenced by the largely uninterrupted

⁵⁰ John Muir National Historic Site CLI, Part 3a, p.3.

⁵¹ Ibid., Part 3a, p.4.

⁵² Sean Baumgarten, Erin Beller, and Robin Grossinger, *Mt. Wanda Historical Ecology Investigation, A Reconnaissance Study Investigating Historical Landscape Data for the John Muir National Historic Site*, San Francisco Estuary Institute Aquatic Science Center, March 2015, p.33.

While this document analyses data within the park boundary prior to the West Hills Farm acquisition, its synthesis of data of Mount Wanda include areas immediately north of the study site where it is reasonable to assume that the vegetation patterns identified for the southern portion of the park-owned Mount Wanda extended south to the newly acquired parcel.

grid pattern of the fruit trees. The natural vegetation species are present on the landscape today, bordering the orchard and most predominantly covering the slopes north of the olives.

Summary

The natural geomorphology, hydrology, climate, and vegetation have all contributed to the establishment of the olive orchard within the site. The steep slopes, limited water, temperate climate, and easily cleared woodland combined to provide a location that olives could thrive.



Natural Systems and Features #1. View of the oak woodland north of the olive orchard, view northwest (NPS, March 2024).



Natural Systems and Features #2. View of the upper Alhambra Valley from Mt. Wanda, view southeast (NPS, March 2024).

Spatial Organization

Spatial organization is the three-dimensional organization of physical forms and visual associations in the landscape, including the articulation of ground, vertical, and overhead planes that define and create spaces. The olive orchard is terraced on a steep slope that is accessible via a winding road.

The olive orchard is arranged in rows on a steep slope with a south facing aspect above the valley where the farmhouse of the historic property is located. The orchard is bisected by a road along a general east-west axis from the northeast of the site. At the bottom of the slope, a row of olives delineates the southern edge of the orchard and the site boundary, while at the top of the slope a row of eucalyptus delineates the northern edge of the orchard and a grove of eucalyptus near the row.

The portion of the orchard north of the road cut is on a terraced slope contouring an east-west trending saddle, approximately 150 feet north-south by 500 feet east-west. Seventy-eight olives are planted across approximately five east-west rows. These trees are largely planted in a grid pattern except where the pattern is broken by two open spaces: one clearing is located in the northern central section of the upper slope olives, measuring approximately forty-five feet north-south by forty feet east-west; the other open space is located on the steep northern slope of the bisecting road cut. While the purpose of these spaces is undetermined, they are visible in the 1939 aerial photograph of the site. An additional seventy-eight olive trees are planted on the steep slope south of the bisecting road cut. The downslope planting area measures approximately 150 feet north-south and 350 feet east-west and comprises approximately seven rows of evenly spaced olives. The southernmost row of olives (trees WH151-WH156) are connected by an old strand of barbed wire which appears to mark the southern extent of the orchard. Olives both upslope and downslope of the bisecting road cut are spaced between fifteen and twenty feet apart.

Starting downslope of the southernmost row of the orchard, an olive row spans southeastward for approximately 700 feet then curves eastward along the natural topography of the hillside towards the valley floor. The olive row terminates behind the residences along Millthwait Drive, near the junction with Alhambra Valley Road.

A row of ten eucalyptus trees, the eucalyptus windbreak, delineates the northern extent of the olive orchard. The row begins immediately north of olive tree WH004, at the northern central clearing, and progresses westward in a regular interval of some thirty feet for six trees. The last three trees of this windbreak are farther and more irregularly spaced with volunteer saplings observed in between.

A grove of eucalyptus is located in the southwestern portion of the West Hills Farm parcel, south of the northern road cut and west of the upper slope olives. This grove of eucalyptus measures an area approximately 250 feet north-south by 160 feet east-west and is bordered by mature oak trees to the south and west, and with the volunteer olive growth to the east.

The spatial organization of the site has been preserved and helps to convey the significance of the agricultural history of the parcel.



Spatial Organization #1. View of the downslope portion of the olive orchard from the bisecting road. The orchard tree foliage displays a warmer green hue than that of the olive row, photo left, which shows a darker, more silver-toned color. View south (NPS, March 2024).



Spatial Organization #2. View of the bisecting road cut and the olives planted on the steep slopes to the south, view southeast (NPS, March 2024).

Vegetation

Vegetation as a landscape characteristic refers to the deciduous and evergreen trees, shrubs, vines, ground covers, and herbaceous plants, and plant communities, whether indigenous or introduced to the landscape. The site's planted vegetation consists of an olive orchard, a row of olive trees, a eucalyptus windbreak, and a eucalyptus grove. Native vegetation is discussed in the Natural Systems and Features section above.

Swett Family Olive Orchard – Contributing (CRIS CL Feature ID 203027)

A 156-tree olive orchard makes up the southern portion of the site. These orchard trees are mature and multi-stemmed, each trunk averaging diameters of twelve to twenty-four inches. The majority of these trees have volunteer sapling growth around the base of the trunk, some more dense than others. Some volunteer growth have matured to look like individual trees while others have so densely established that the individual trees are obscuring to look like a hedge.

Although specific varieties of olives in the orchard have not yet been identified, based on the likely date of planting, 1881-1889, and the Swett Family's close relationship to the Muir-Strentzel Family, the olive orchard likely comprises a similar, if not the same, palette as the orchard on Mount Wanda: Mission, Redding Picholine, and Manzanillo olives. Vegetation within the orchard is homogeneous, strictly olives, with little to no ground cover. Along the edges of the orchard, various oak trees are observed. This olive orchard established by John Swett and family between 1881 and 1889 is a contributing resource.

Olive Row – Contributing (CRIS CL Feature ID 203028)

A single row of olive trees one-quarter mile long defines the southern boundary of the cultural landscape. This row of olives appears homogeneous in variety. While the specific variety has not yet been identified, the foliage of these trees is comparatively darker and more silver-toned compared to those of the orchard trees which display a warmer green hue. This visually identifiable difference in variety helps identify the western extent of the olive row from the orchard rows, and suggests that they were planted with a different purpose.

Approximately 300 feet of hog wire fence lines the olives, starting from the southeast corner of the orchard southeastward. The fence is installed on the northeastern side of the trees, on the park side, and catches the sill from the slopes which creates a bench in the slope that resembles a short trail under the canopy of the row. The date and responsible party of the fence installation is unknown.

The maturity of the trees that comprise the row are very similar to the orchard trees which suggests that these trees were planted congruently with the orchard. The olive row was therefore likely planted between 1881-1889 and is a contributing resource.

Eucalyptus Windbreak – Undetermined (CRIS CL Feature ID 203029)

A eucalyptus windbreak of ten trees lines the north edge of the northern branch of the old road cut. The ten eucalyptus trees appear to be varying in age, some with established, mature trunks and others resembling clusters of stump growth rather than individual specimens.

While the Swett Family is historically known to have grown eucalyptus trees on their Hill Girt Ranch property, the exact date of planting of the eucalyptus windbreak cannot be determined. The contributing status of the eucalyptus windbreak is therefore undetermined.

Eucalyptus Grove – Undetermined (CRIS CL Feature ID 203030)

A grove of eucalyptus trees is located at the western end of the upslope olives. This grove comprises trees of varying age and condition. Evidence of tree removals were observed closer to the olives. The exact date of planting cannot be determined, so the contributing status of the eucalyptus grove is undetermined.

Summary

The vegetation within the cultural landscape conveys the significance of the site's association with historic agriculture. The landscape includes a contributing olive orchard and the olive row, and a undetermined status eucalyptus windbreak and grove.



Vegetation #1. View of the olive trees in the northwestern section of the orchard, view east (NPS, March 2024).



Vegetation #2. View of the olive trees in the northeastern section of the orchard, view west (NPS, March 2024).



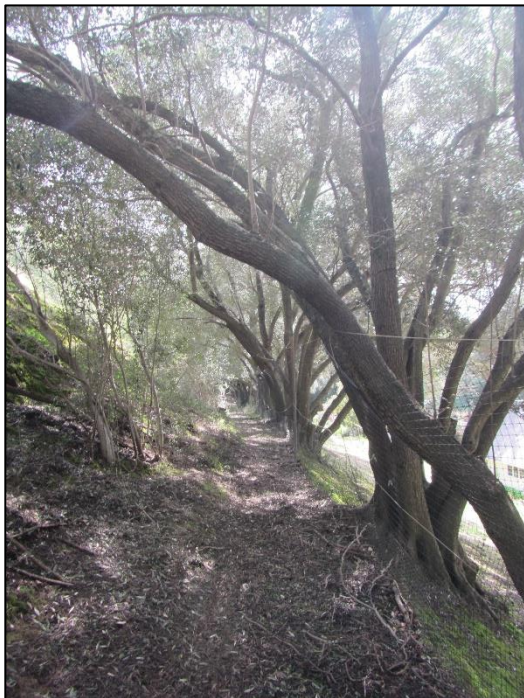
Vegetation #3. View of southern terraced row of olives upslope of the bisecting road cut, view west (NPS, March 2024).



Vegetation #4. View of olives planted in rows into the steep slope in the southern section of the orchard. Note the loss in definition of the terraces from erosion. View east (NPS, March 2024).



Vegetation #5. View of the gridded planting pattern of olives in the southern portion of the orchard, view northeast (NPS, March 2024).



Vegetation #6. View of the olive row that defines the southern boundary of the landscape. Note the "trail" created as a result of silt that is caught by the hog wire fence. View southeast (NPS, March 2024).



Vegetation #7. View of the olive row from outside the landscape boundary, view east (NPS, March 2024).



Vegetation #8. View of the eucalyptus windbreak that lines the north edge of the northern road cut, in the northwest section of the orchard. View west (NPS, March 2024).



Vegetation #9. View of the eucalyptus grove to the west of the northern section of the olive orchard, view west (NPS, March 2024).

Feature Name	Feature Contribution	CRIS CL Feature ID	CRIS-HS Resource Name	CRIS-HS Resource ID	CRIS-AR Resource ID	FMSS Record Number
Olive Orchard	Contributing	203027				
Olive Row	Contributing	203027				
Eucalyptus Windbreak	Undetermined	203028				
Eucalyptus Grove	Undetermined	203029				

Circulation

Circulation refers to the spaces, features, and applied material finishes which constitute systems of movement in a landscape. There is one noncontributing circulation system within the site.

Old Road Cut – Non-contributing

An old road cut is located within the site and includes two branches. The southern branch of the road cut bisects the olive orchard. As the road cuts through the orchard, the southernmost row of the olives upslope of the road cut and the northernmost row of the olives downslope of it create an appearance of an allée along the circulation passage. From the branching point, this route stretches westward for about 400 feet then curves southwestward towards the southern property boundary. The northern branch of the road cut bounds the northern extent of the upslope olives and is lined by the eucalyptus windbreak along its north edge. The route first branches northwestward then curves westward, continuing in this direction to the north side of the eucalyptus and extends beyond the park boundary. This road cut circulation system is an unpaved and unimproved and varies in width from approximately six to twelve feet wide.

1939 aerial photographs show that the road cut was a part of an internal road system for the larger Hill Girt Ranch. The southern branch continued its southerly course to traverse through various orchards and vineyards to connect to the historic ranch core in the valley floor. The northern branch is less discernable and likely led to other cultivated fields further west. The 1965 aerial photograph shows the northern branch of the road cut now curving further southwestward to join with a dirt road or trail granting access to the southern hills. Although historically a part of a larger circulation system to the Hill Girt Ranch operation, developments in the valley has modified or removed portions of the larger road system. The old road cut no longer has integrity and is non-contributing.

Access Trail – Undetermined

An access trail traverses the site from the northeast portion of the parcel from the western branch of Alhambra Valley Road, north of the Mt. Wanda olive orchard, to join the old road cut

approximately 600 feet southeast of the olive orchard. This trail is an unimproved two-track dirt trail used by the park for vehicular access. As this trail alignment largely passes through the oak and laurel woodland of the slopes, its historic status is difficult to determine based on aerial photographs. The contributing status of this trail is undetermined.



Circulation #1. View of the two road cut branches from the east of the northern section of the orchard, view west (NPS, March 2024).



Circulation #2. View of the access trail as it approaches its junction with the old road cut, view southwest (NPS, March 2024).

Feature Name	Feature Contribution	CRIS CL Feature ID	CRIS-HS Resource Name	CRIS-HS Resource ID	CRIS-AR Resource ID	FMSS Record Number
Old Road Cut	Non Contributing	203026				
Access Trail	Undetermined	203032				

Buildings and Structures

Buildings are elements constructed primarily for sheltering any form of human activity in a landscape, while structures are elements constructed for functional purposes other than sheltering human activity. There is one non-contributing building within the site.

Shed – Non-Contributing

A three-sided shed is located in the southeast corner of the site near a large tree. The structure is a wood frame structure with a corrugated metal shed roof set on compact soil with no visible foundation. Within the shed are two wood troughs on the south wall on the west side. These troughs are mounted directly to the frame of the southern wall and are made of the same types of wood as the frame. The shed appears to be constructed after the period of significance. The shed is therefore a non-contributing resource.



Buildings and Structures #1. View of three-sided wood-framed shed, view south (NPS, March 2024).

Feature Name	Feature Contribution	CRIS CL Feature ID	CRIS-HS Resource Name	CRIS-HS Resource ID	CRIS-AR Resource ID	FMSS Record Number
Shed	Non Contributing	203031	West Hills Farm Shed	1172239		

Condition Assessment

Condition

Fair

Condition Date

03/12/2023

Narrative

West Hills Farm is in fair condition. Minor disturbances within the historic site include vegetation overgrowth and erosion.

Impacts

Type	Impact Type – Other	Internal Source	External Source	Narrative	Date Identified
Erosion		No	Yes	The orchard terraces are eroding due to soil movement during storms.	03/12/2024
Deferred Maintenance		Yes	No	Significant volunteer olive growth are present around numerous orchard trees. In some sections of the orchard, the volunteer growth is so prevalent that the grid pattern of the trees is beginning to be obscure.	03/12/2024

Stabilization Measures

Narrative

Overgrown volunteer growth around the orchard trees should be removed to preserve the orchard grid.

Treatment

Approved Treatments

Type

Preservation

Completed

No

Document

Other Document – Comprehensive Site Management Plan

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	California Land Act of 1851, Section 1.		

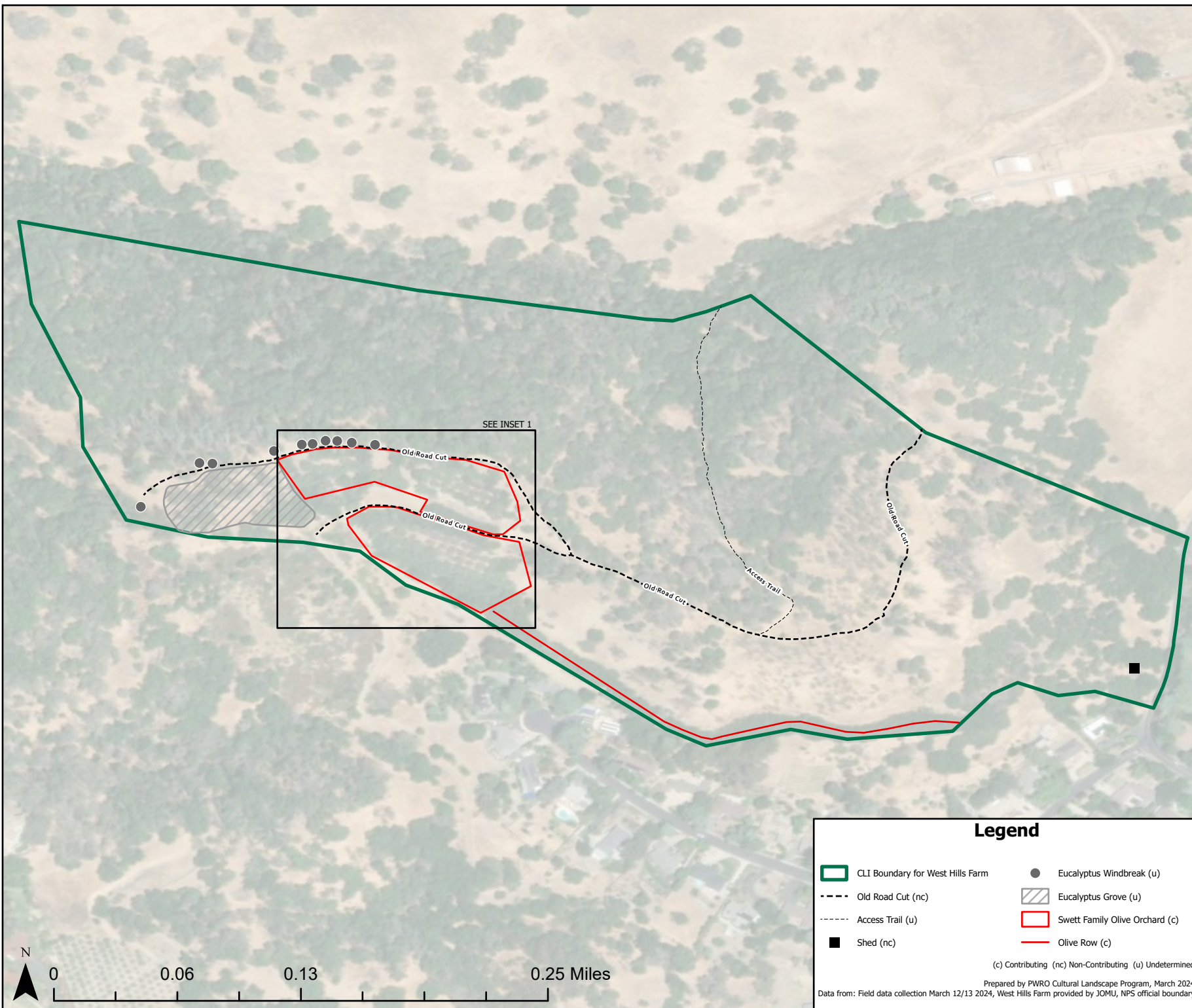
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Supplemental Information

Supplemental Information Title	Supplemental Information Narrative
Appendix A: Site Plans	Existing condition site plan of the overall landscape and an inset of the olive orchard trees.



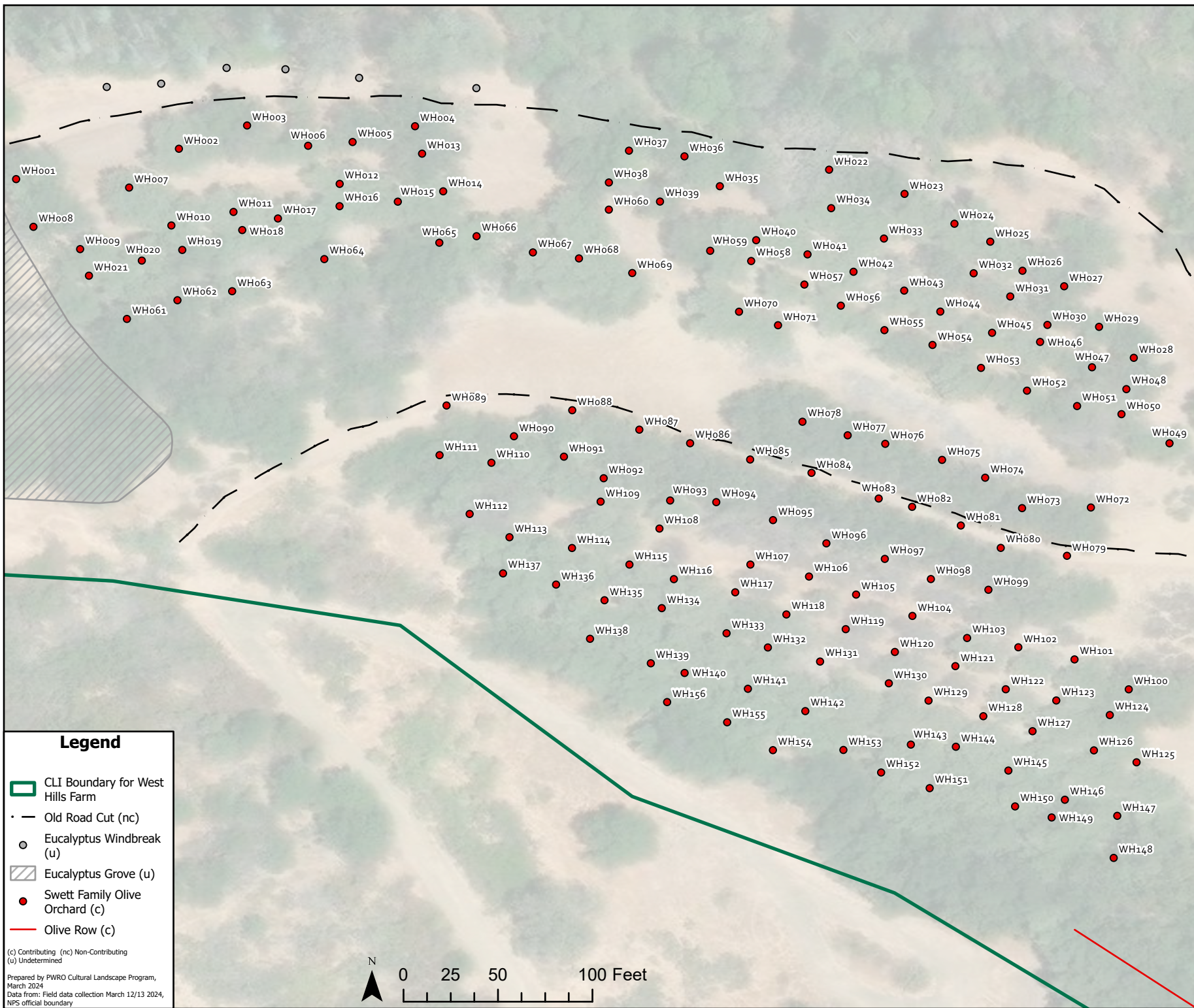
Legend

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| CLI Boundary for West Hills Farm | Eucalyptus Windbreak (u) |
| Old Road Cut (nc) | Eucalyptus Grove (u) |
| Access Trail (u) | Swett Family Olive Orchard (c) |
| Shed (nc) | Olive Row (c) |

(c) Contributing (nc) Non-Contributing (u) Undetermined

Prepared by PWRO Cultural Landscape Program, March 2024

Data from: Field data collection March 12/13 2024, West Hills Farm provided by JOMU, NPS official boundary



Legend

- CLI Boundary for West Hills Farm
- Old Road Cut (nc)
- Eucalyptus Windbreak (u)
- Eucalyptus Grove (u)
- Swett Family Olive Orchard (c)
- Olive Row (c)

(c) Contributing (nc) Non-Contributing
(u) Undetermined

Prepared by PWRD Cultural Landscape Program,
March 2024
Data from: Field data collection March 12/13 2024,
NPS official boundary