

## Sugar Land 95 podcast interview request

14 messages

**Brittney Martin**

Wed, Mar 15, 2023 at 1:50 PM

To: Bill.Martin@thc.texas.gov, Chris Florance <chris.florance@thc.texas.gov>

Hi Mr. Martin and Mr. Florance, I hope this email finds you well. I'm a journalist working on a podcast series about the Sugar Land 95 in collaboration with The Texas Newsroom. I'd love to find a time for us to sit down either in person or via Zoom to go over the following questions regarding the Sugar Land 95 discovery and its aftermath:

- Principal Research Group received a data recovery permit to conduct genetic and genealogical studies on the remains of the Sugar Land 95. Why were they best qualified to do that work? Why is this work being done under a different permit than the one that covered the exhumation and reburial?
- As land owners, what was Fort Bend ISD required to do once the cemetery was discovered? (ex: hire archeologists, publish the Back to Bondage report, mark the graves, etc.)
- Why did you seek AG approval to grant permission to do destructive analysis?
- What was THC's process for evaluating the Back to Bondage report for historical accuracy?
- Many people I've spoken with have raised concerns about the name of the cemetery—The Bullhead Convict Labor Camp Cemetery. What was THC's process for evaluating the historical accuracy of that name leading up to issuing a historical marker?
- Could other organizations or academic institutions (outside of PRG) conduct research on the remains of the Sugar Land 95 curated by TARL?

Our deadline is fast approaching, so if we could schedule the interview for this week or next, I would appreciate it. If not, please respond to these questions in writing in that timeframe.

I appreciate your time. If you have any questions, feel free to give me a call at [REDACTED]

Best,

--

Brittney Martin  
Independent Journalist  
[@beedotmartin](https://twitter.com/beedotmartin)  
[brittneymartin.com](https://www.brittneymartin.com)

**Chris Florance** <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>

Fri, Mar 17, 2023 at 2:19 PM

To: Brittney Martin [REDACTED]

Hi Brittney - We have a lot of staff out this week, but I will touch base with our archeologists on Monday and can provide answers to your questions below - thanks!



**Chris Florance**  
Director  
Communications Division



[thc.texas.gov](https://thc.texas.gov)



---

**Brittney Martin** [REDACTED]  
To: Chris Florance <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>

Tue, Mar 21, 2023 at 12:18 PM

Hey Chris, just following up on this. Would love to get an interview set up for this week if possible. Let me know!  
[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Brittney Martin** [REDACTED]  
To: Chris Florance <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>

Mon, Mar 27, 2023 at 11:53 AM

Hey Chris, I still haven't heard back from you. If we don't get an interview on the books or written answers back today, we're going to have to say that the agency didn't respond to our questions. Please know that Bill Martin's emails are quoted throughout the series, so we really would like to give him a chance to respond.

Thank you,

On Fri, Mar 17, 2023 at 2:19PM Chris Florance <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov> wrote:  
[Quoted text hidden]  
[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Chris Florance** <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>  
To: Brittney Martin [REDACTED]

Mon, Mar 27, 2023 at 12:47 PM

Hi Brittney – Sorry for the late response, I was not able to connect with some staff until this morning. Please see below notes – let me know if you have any questions. Thanks!

Hi Mr. Martin and Mr. Florance, I hope this email finds you well. I'm a journalist working on a podcast series about the Sugar Land 95 in collaboration with The Texas Newsroom. I'd love to find a time for us to sit down either in person or via Zoom to go over the following questions regarding the Sugar Land 95 discovery and its aftermath:

Principal Research Group received a data recovery permit to conduct genetic and genealogical studies on the remains of the Sugar Land 95. Why were they best qualified to do that work? Why is this work being done under a different permit than the one that covered the exhumation and reburial?

Answer - It is up to the discretion of the party responsible for the archeology (in this case FBISD) to select and hire a qualified firm. However, the agency only issues Antiquities Code archeology permits to organizations and specialists who meet professional qualifications requirements in the Texas Administrative Code ([https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p\\_dir=&p\\_rloc=&p\\_tloc=&p\\_ploc=&pg=1&p\\_tac=&ti=13&pt=2&ch=26&rl=13](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=R&app=9&p_dir=&p_rloc=&p_tloc=&p_ploc=&pg=1&p_tac=&ti=13&pt=2&ch=26&rl=13)). For the purposes of timely completion of the reporting and curation of the excavation phase of the project, the decision was made to curate the samples at the Texas Archeological Research Lab per the requirements of the permit. Because a separate permit is required to conduct destructive analysis on human remains that are part of state-associated collections (meaning it came from lands controlled by a subdivision of the state), the second permit was issued to conduct the ongoing genetic analysis.

As land owners, what was Fort Bend ISD required to do once the cemetery was discovered? (ex: hire archeologists, publish the Back to Bondage report, mark the graves, etc.)

Answer - They were required to stop work and consult with the THC regarding a path forward.

- Why did you seek AG approval to grant permission to do destructive analysis?

Answer - The Antiquities Code specifies that the THC can grant permission for the destructive analysis of artifacts. Since human remains are not artifacts, the THC sought guidance from the AG on the matter.

- What was THC's process for evaluating the Back to Bondage report for historical accuracy?

Answer - All reports are reviewed by experienced staff at the THC. Much of the historical research was conducted by one of our long term archeological stewards who had worked for TDCJ at the prison in Huntsville curating their records. She had better access to the necessary documents than most anyone else. She has provided useful information on the Rusk State Hospital (which was originally built around 1880 as a prison and later converted to a mental institution).

- Many people I've spoken with have raised concerns about the name of the cemetery--The Bullhead Convict Labor Camp Cemetery. What was THC's process for evaluating the historical accuracy of that name leading up to issuing a historical marker?

Answer - That is the only documented name that could be found during the historical research on this Convict Labor Camp. One of the guards interviewed as part of the legislative inquiry into the nature of the Convict labor System in 1910 referred to it by that name.

- Could other organizations or academic institutions (outside of PRG) conduct research on the remains of the Sugar Land 95 curated by TARL?

Answer - Yes, but that decision would be made by TARL.

**Chris Florance**

[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Brittney Martin** [REDACTED]  
To: Chris Florance <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>

Mon, Mar 27, 2023 at 4:20 PM

Hey Chris, thank you for this. To clarify...Fort Bend ISD hired Goshawk to do the archeology work and they received the first permit (that covered the exhumations, reburial and Back to Bondage report). But THC issued the second permit to PRG. My question was, why did THC choose PRG?  
Did Sandra Rogers work for THC?  
Would TARL need to consult THC before granting permission to another institution to do research on the remains of the Sugar Land 95? If so, in what ways would the research proposal need to be different from PRGs proposal?

[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Chris Florance** <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>  
To: Brittney Martin [REDACTED]

Mon, Mar 27, 2023 at 5:50 PM

Hi Brittney -

I am could not reach anyone about your question regarding PRG, but I should be able to provide something tomorrow.

Sandra Rogers is a member of the Texas Archeological Stewardship Network. She has worked alongside THC staff for years as both a steward and a member of local and state archeological societies. There is more info about the network here - [Texas Archeological Stewards | THC.Texas.gov](#) - [Texas Historical Commission](#). I don't believe she has ever been an employee of THC - if so this predated the folks I was able to reach today but I can check with our HR department tomorrow to confirm.

TARL is a certified curatorial repository for state-associated held-in-trust collections. This gives them authority to manage research into collections under their control that were collected under an Antiquities Permit and maintained in perpetuity on behalf of the people of Texas. TARL has internal policies that govern access and research in their collections that also meet the requirements of the THC's certification program. They would only need to consult with us if the research involved actions that required permission for the THC, such as destructive analysis of human remains or disposal and deaccessioning of collections.

Thanks and let me know if you have any other questions.

**Chris Florance**

---

**Brittney Martin** [REDACTED]  
To: Chris Florance <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>

Mon, Mar 27, 2023 at 6:29 PM

Thank you! This is so helpful. Re: PRG. I'm just looking to know what led THC to decide to give them the permit to do the genealogical and genetic research. What made them the best ones for the job? Did anyone else apply? That kind of thing.  
[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Brittney Martin** [REDACTED]  
To: Chris Florance <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>

Wed, Mar 29, 2023 at 1:44 PM

Hey Chris, just following up on that last question there and wanted to add one more. When will the Bullhead Camp Cemetery historical marker be erected at the site?  
[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Chris Florance** <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>  
To: Brittney Martin [REDACTED]

Fri, Mar 31, 2023 at 1:57 PM

Hi Brittney - Apologies I have not been in the office and am very behind on emails. PRG was not a consultant that was selected by THC to do the work. They applied for the permit to conduct destructive testing (necessary for DNA) once it was submitted to TARL (the curatorial repository) by FBISD to complete the exhumation permit requirements.

I am checking on the marker and should know today - I likely won't know when it will be placed, but I might have an update on where it is in regards to fabrication, if the county/property owner has it yet, etc.

Typically the placement of the marker is something the property owner and local county historical commission decide on, but I will let you know what I find out - thanks!

**Chris Florance**

---

**Brittney Martin** [REDACTED]  
To: Chris Florance <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>

Fri, Mar 31, 2023 at 2:42 PM

Sorry, Chris. I don't think I'm following. Fort Bend ISD had the original permit, which closed when Back to Bondage was published. PRG applied to THC for a second permit to do the DNA and genealogical work. THC granted the permit. My question, was anyone else considered by THC to do the DNA and genealogical work? Or was PRG the only group to express interest?

[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Chris Florance** <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>  
To: Brittney Martin [REDACTED]

Fri, Mar 31, 2023 at 3:00 PM

Hi Brittney - I will try to get back to you as soon as we can, but it will probably be Monday - both the staffers I reached out to are gone for the day. Let me know if you need anything else, thanks!

**Chris Florance**

---

**Chris Florance** <Chris.Florance@thc.texas.gov>  
To: Brittney Martin [REDACTED]

Thu, Apr 6, 2023 at 8:50 AM

Hi Brittney – Sorry this has taken so long –

PRG is the only group to express interest and apply for the destructive analysis permit. We would evaluate any other group asking for a permit in the same way.

The marker is still being written, we would expect it to be fabricated and ready for placement late this year or sometime in 2024.

Let me know if you have any other questions – thanks!

[Quoted text hidden]