Guidance for Literature Review and Background Research

08/21/2025

Contents

Overview of the Statewide Inventory

The State Historic Preservation Office has a webpage that gives an overview of the Statewide Inventory: https://mn.gov/admin/shpo/surveyandinventory/research/ and one with general links: https://mn.gov/admin/shpo/surveyandinventory/. Below is an outline of the different resources available.

Office of the State Archaeologist Portal

The Minnesota Office of the State Archaeologist maintains the OSA Portal, which is a web viewer for archaeological information. The OSA Portal recently launched as a new version in the summer of 2025 and now holds SHPO information on archaeological sites and surveys. However, only a subset of survey reports (approximately 2,000 out of 10,000) are currently available in the OSA Portal.

To obtain access to the OSA Portal, go to the website, click "Login" in the top right corner, then follow the instructions to request an account as an external user or a state employee.

The Minnesota Statewide Historic Inventory Portal (MnSHIP)

The vast majority of the SHPO's architectural history inventory is available through the Minnesota Statewide Historic Inventory Portal (MnSHIP) application (https://mnship.gisdata.mn.gov/). MnSHIP includes a map feature showing the geometry for inventoried properties, as well as inventory forms, eligibility statuses, and associated report numbers. Interdisciplinary properties, Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs), and archaeological districts are shown at the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) Section-level. Information on interdisciplinary properties and archaeological districts, which constitutes non-public data under state law, can be requested from SHPO by emailing DataRequestSHPO@state.mn.us and providing archaeological credentials.

The SHPO website has a listing of architecture and history reports that you can request by report number via email.

Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office Files

The Minnesota SHPO maintains databases of archaeological reports and architecture history reports that are not available online. Instructions for requesting data from the SHPO databases is posted on their website. Since the re-launch of the OSA Portal in the summer of 2025 and the launch of MnSHIP in the fall of 2023, the only information which should be requested from SHPO is digitized architecture-history reports, archaeological report information and digitized archaeology reports (for reports not in the OSA Portal), and documentation on interdisciplinary or archaeological historic districts as noted in the relevant MnSHIP record. Requests can be made for a list of archaeological reports by county. Please reference the inventory number and/or district or property name when requesting documentation on interdisciplinary and/or archaeological historic districts, and reference the report number when requesting architecture-history reports from the list on SHPO's website: https://mn.gov/admin/shpo/surveyandinventory/research/ahreports.jsp.

Please note that less than 20% of archaeological reports are scanned and available to remote researchers, and we do not have the capacity to scan reports for remote researchers. All architecture-history reports have been scanned and are available to remote researchers.

Minnesota Office of the State Archaeologist Files

The Minnesota Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA) maintains a database of archaeology reports and files of copies of those reports that are not available online. Instructions for searching the OSA archaeology reports is posted on their website.

Literature Review Resources

There are several sources of background information, historical maps, and historical and modern aerial imagery that are available for the state of Minnesota, including:

- Historical maps and documents available at the Gale Family Library, Minnesota Historical Society https://www.mnhs.org/library
- Historical maps available from the John R. Borchert Map Library at the University of Minnesota https://www.lib.umn.edu/collections/borchert
- Historical maps and documents available from the Minnesota Historical Society's MNopedia https://www3.mnhs.org/mnopedia
- Publications of the Minnesota Historical Society https://www.mnhs.org/mnhspress
- Historical aerial imagery available from National Environmental Title Research https://www.historicaerials.com/
- Historical aerial imagery available from the Minnesota Historical Aerial Photographs Online (these are available as a layer in the OSA Portal map) https://apps.lib.umn.edu/mhapo/index.html
- Historical US Geologic Survey topographic quadrangle maps available from topoView https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/
- Minnesota Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment-funded Statewide Survey archaeological publications https://mn.gov/admin/archaeologist/professional-archaeologists/research/statewide-survey/
- Minnesota Multiple Property Documentation Forms https://mn.gov/admin/shpo/registration/mpdf/
- Minnesota Statewide Historic Contexts (request from SHPO by title) https://mn.gov/admin/shpo/planning/context/
- Publications of the Minnesota Archaeological Society https://mnarchsociety.org/?page_id=17
- Publications of the National Register of Historic Places https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/publications.htm

How to Research and Obtain Copies of Survey Reports

Architecture History Reports

SHPO's website has a list of architecture history reports that is periodically updated: https://mn.gov/admin/shpo/surveyandinventory/research/ahreports.jsp.

Architecture history report numbers are also available in individual MnSHIP records as they relate to individual properties under the "SHPO Report Numbers" field.

Request an architecture history report as needed by emailing the report number to DataRequestSHPO@state.mn.us.

Request a list of archaeology survey reports by County by emailing SHPO DataRequestSHPO@state.mn.us.

Archaeology Reports

The OSA Portal has a subset (~2,000) of SHPO's 10,000 archaeology survey reports.

Request **a list of archaeology survey reports** from SHPO by county or multiple counties by emailing DataRequestSHPO@state.mn.us. A list of reports within a specific geographic area or within a specific township, range, and section is not available.

Archaeology report numbers are available in the OSA Portal or MnSHIP for specific archaeology site records or historic resource records as they relate to individual properties or districts under the "SHPO Report Number" field in each application.

Request **specific archaeology reports** from SHPO by report number by emailing DataRequestSHPO@state.mn.us.
- Please note that less than 20% of archaeological reports scanned and available to remote researchers and we do not have the capacity to scan reports for remote researchers.

If the report is not available digitally, request an appointment for in-person research to research the archaeological reports (which are not scanned) by requesting an appointment via email DataRequestSHPO@state.mn.us. Currently, appointments are limited to Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday between 9 am and 4 pm.

How to Use MnSHIP for Background Research/Literature Review

These instructions show how to gather information on previously documented properties from MnSHIP (https://mnship.gisdata.mn.gov/). This information may include archaeological and/or interdisciplinary districts, and traditional cultural places.

1. You can search spatially by searching a specific Township, Range, and Section, a specific address, zooming to a location on the map, or by uploading a shapefile (Figure 1). For detailed instructions on using the map feature to search in MnSHIP, please see the MnSHIP User Guide (https://mn.gov/admin/assets/MnSHIP%20User%20Guide%2001082024_tcm36-600082.pdf

Figure 1. MnSHIP upload a shapefile tool
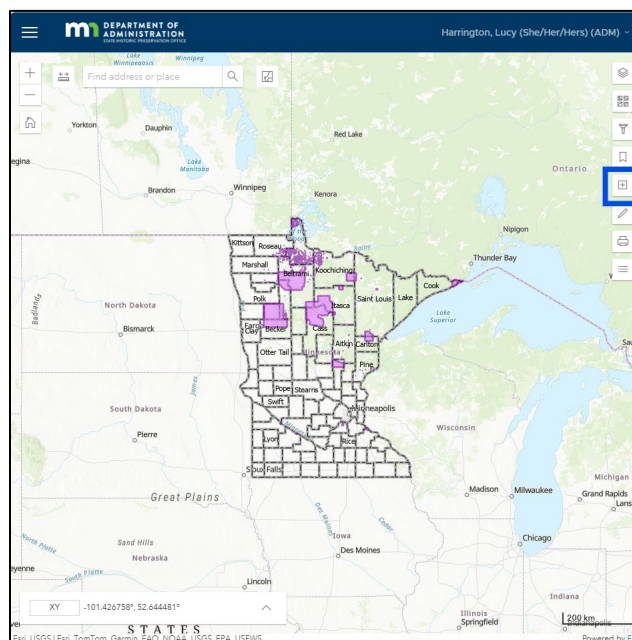
2. If you are conducting a spatial search using a shapefile, first upload a shapefile, then open the "Basic Search" tool and set the "Spatial Relationship" to "Only return features that intersect with the uploaded shapefile" (Figure 2). If you are in the Private Map from the Credentialed User Log In, this tool is called "Advanced Search."

Figure 2. MnSHIP Basic Search tool and searching the uploaded shapefile location
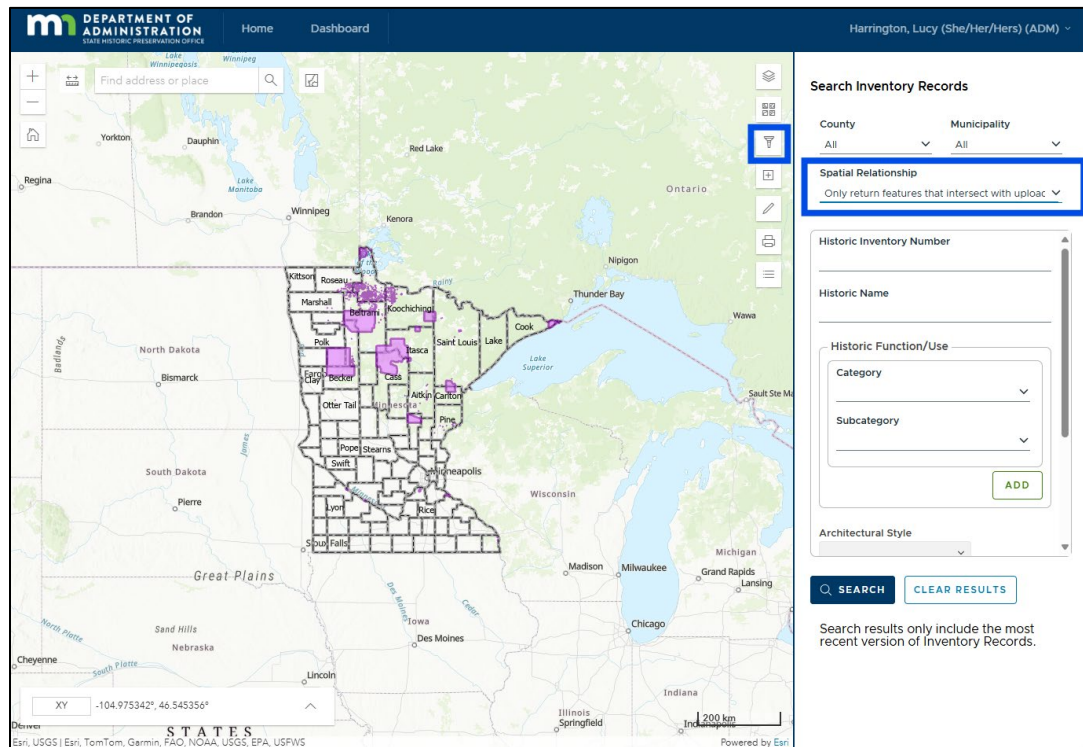
Note: Unlike the OSA Portal, MnSHIP results will have four tables to view, "Points," "Lines," "Polygons," and "Restricted." It is important to view all of the tables because a given search area may have resources of different types. You must be logged in as a credentialed user to see any information about "Restricted" properties.

Figure 3. MnSHIP - search by Township, Range, and Section
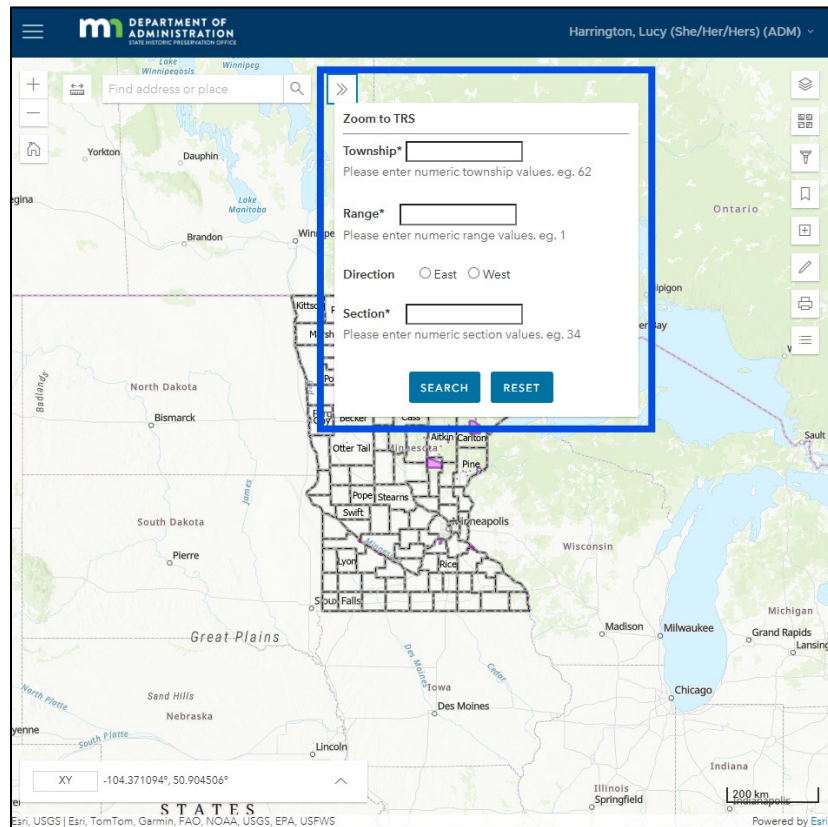
3. Other ways to search the map in MnSHIP include searching a specific Township, Range, and Section (Figure 3) or zooming to an address or general location and searching by Map Extent (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. MnSHIP - search by a generic location and map extent**
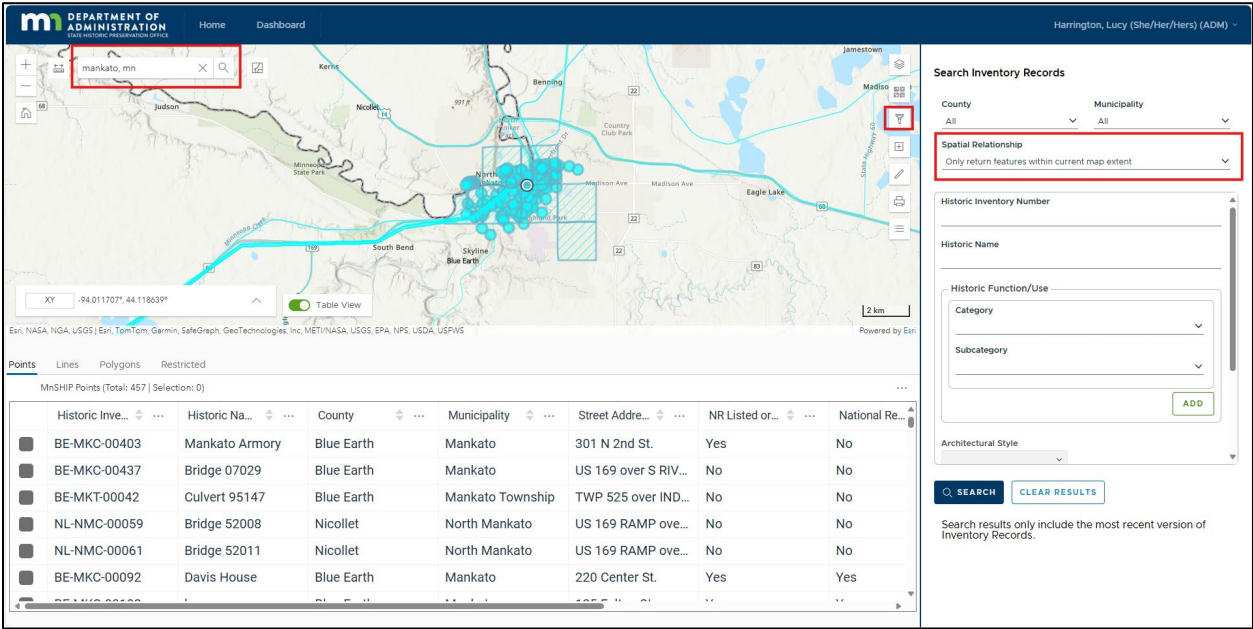
How to Use the OSA Portal for Background Research/Literature Review

These instructions show how to gather information on previously documented archaeological sites and districts from the OSA Portal (https://osaportal.gisdata.mn.gov/).

1. Log into the OSA Portal and go to the Cultural Resource Professional's Map.
2. You can search spatially by searching a specific Township, Range, and Section (Figure 5), a specific address, zooming to a location on the map, or by uploading a shapefile.
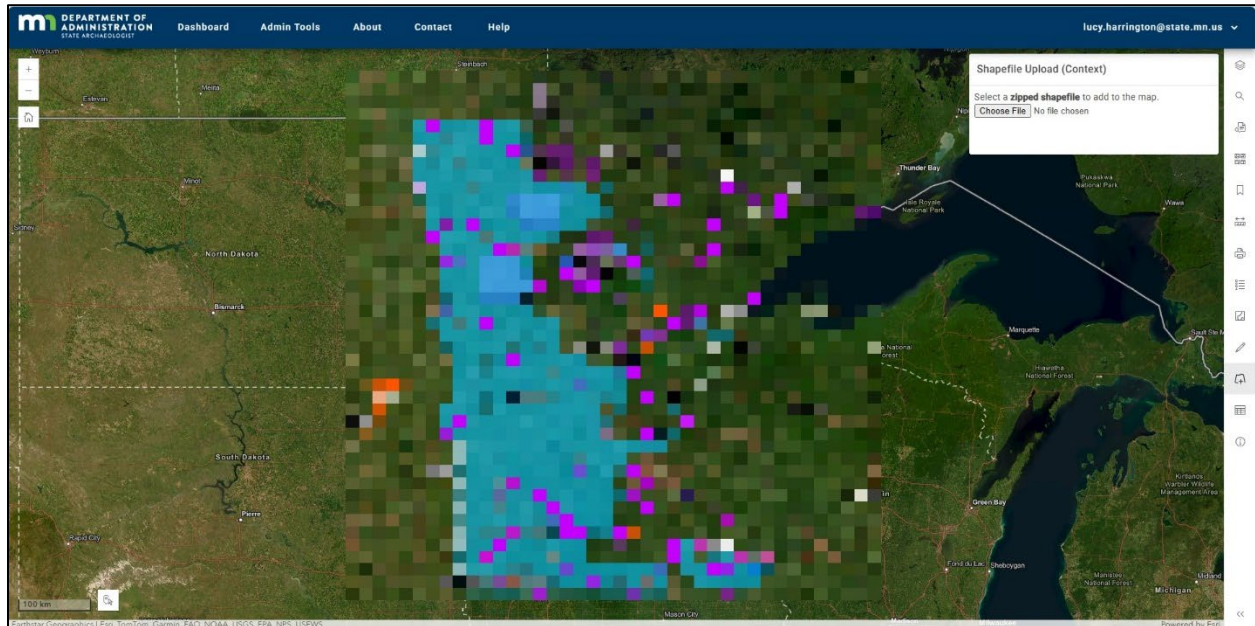
Figure 5. OSA Portal - search by Township, Range, and Section
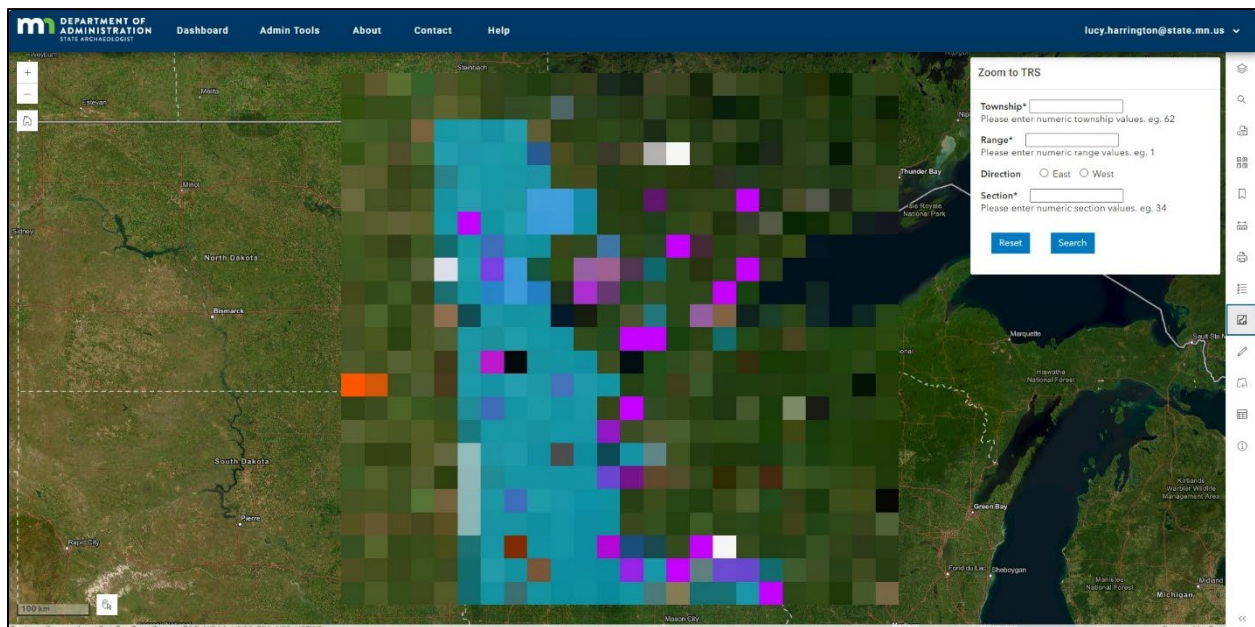
3. How to search using shapefile: from the right-hand panel, click Shapefile Upload (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Search the OSA Portal using a shapefile

4. Click "Search by Attributes" from the panel of tools at the right. From the "Spatial Relationship" attribute, select "Only return features that intersect with uploaded shapefile and press "Search" (Figure 7).

Figure 7. OSA Portal - only return features that intersect with uploaded shapefile

5. A feature table will pop-up on the bottom of the screen with a list of the archaeological sites that intersect the uploaded shapefile (Figure 8).

Figure 8. OSA Portal - search results in table format in the map based on a shapefile
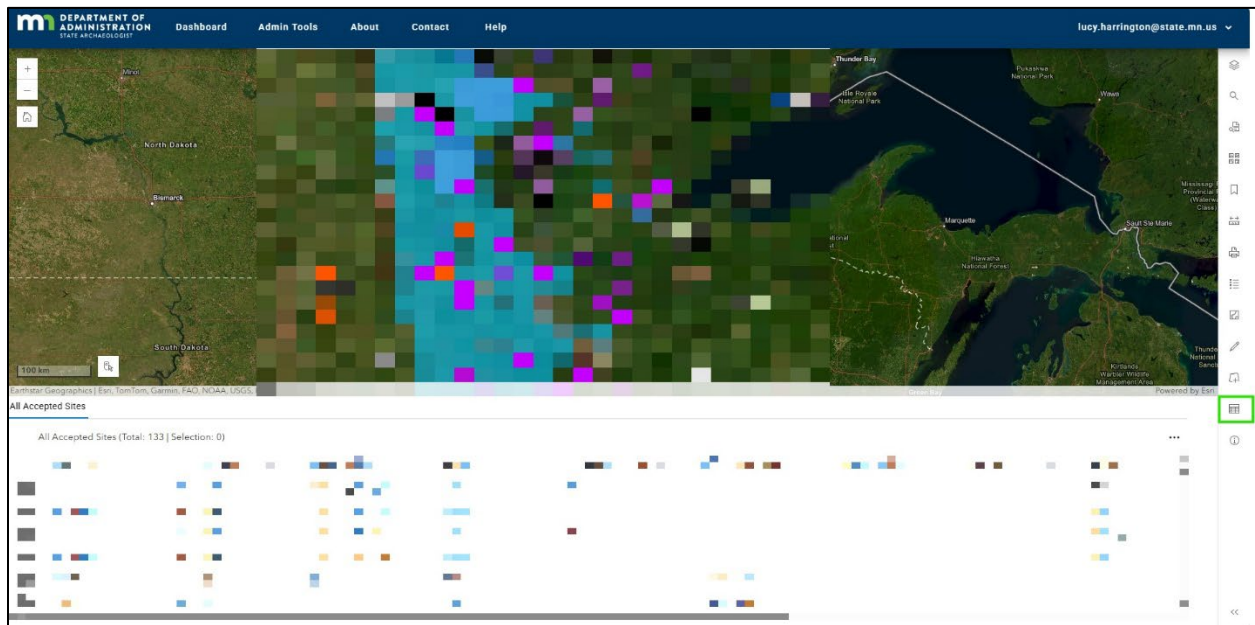
6. You can export the table to a CSV (comma separated values) file that can be opened in Excel as a spreadsheet for ease of use (Figure 9).

Figure 9. OSA Portal - export search results as a CSV for use in Excel
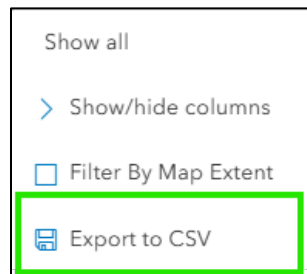
7. To search the OSA Portal and export a CSV without uploading a shapefile, you can also search by map extent (Figure 10).

Figure 10. OSA Portal - search by generic location to obtain a feature table by map extent

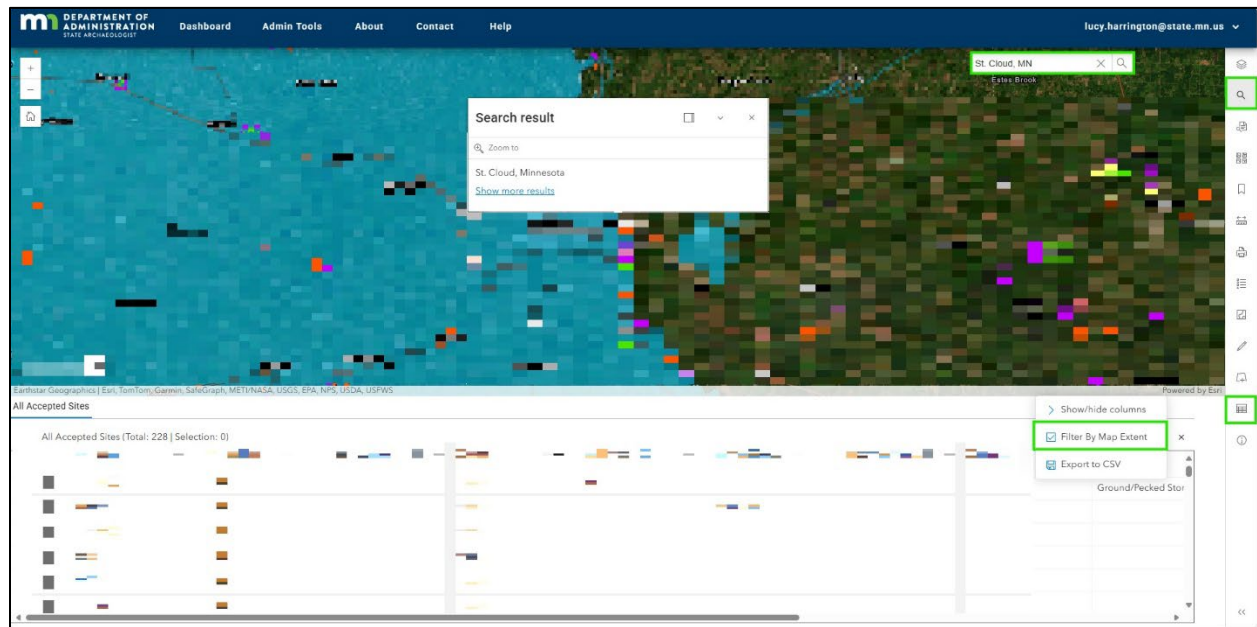8. You can search by Township Range and Section, by address, by a generic location name, etc… and then open the Attribute Table and click "Filter by Map Extent" to get a list of sites in that general area (Figure 10). The results list can then be exported to a CSV and opened with Excel to see a list of archaeological sites in that general area.
9. How to Interpret the CSV Results (Figure 11):

The exported CSV will have many columns. The data related to eligibility, NRHP status, etc… is in the fields that start with "SHPO-" (Figure 11). The information available in the CSV is the same as the information available on each individual site record. The utility of the CSV is that it presents this information in table format, which is similar to, but more detailed than, the table that SHPO provided in response to research requests before the re-launch of the OSA Portal.

Figure 11. Example exported CSV with some of the SHPO fields

Explanation of SHPO's Fields in the OSA Portal

SHPO Details

The SHPO Details are the fields that SHPO uses to track information about the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), the National Historic Landmark program, the Keeper of the NRHP Determinations of Eligibility (DOE), the Minnesota State Register of Historic Places, SHPO eligibility concurrences, SHPO report numbers, and SHPO comments related to archaeological sites. Prior to the re-launch of the OSA Portal in the summer of 2025, this information was maintained in SHPO's internal Archaeology database. The SHPO Details are also where SHPO manages documentation for individual archaeological sites including NRHP nominations and eligibility files. Historically, SHPO has created eligibility files for individual archaeological sites, but this has not been consistent and will not be part of SHPO's practice going forward. This practice is an artifact of a paper-based inventory.

An overview of the SHPO Fields

NRHP Listed or Previously Determined Eligible (Options: Listed, Eligible, No)
- This field is used to quickly identify whether an archaeological site has been listed in the NRHP (either individually or within a district) or previously determined eligible. The value "No" in this field means the site has not been listed in the NRHP or previously been determined eligible. The value "No" in this field *does not mean the site is not eligible*; in most cases, it indicates that the site has not been evaluated.

National Register: This is a group of fields that describes whether a site is listed in the NRHP. This group of fields only shows up for sites that are listed.
- The group of fields includes Listing Name, Listing Date, NPS Reference Number, Contributing Status, and Removed from Register.
  - **Listing Name**: This is the name of the property from the NRHP nomination.
  - **Listing Date**: This is the date that the National Park Service (NPS) approved the nomination for inclusion in the NRHP.
  - **NPS Reference Number**: This is the number the NPS assigns to the NRHP property (also known as the National Register Information System [NRIS] number).
  - **Contributing Status**: This field describes whether the site is individually listed or within a district. If the site is within a district, the values will either be Contributing, Non-Contributing, or Unevaluated based on the NRHP nomination. If SHPO staff find or concur that a site is contributing or non-contributing to a district, that status will be in the group of fields named "SHPO Evaluation and Environmental Review Program Status."
  - **Removed from Register**: This field is the date that the NPS removed the property from listing in the NRHP.

Determination of Eligibility: This is a group of fields that describes whether the Keeper of the NRHP has provided an opinion on a site's eligibility. The Keeper of the NRHP can provide an opinion upon request, but most often provides an opinion when a property is nominated to the NRHP but the property's owner(s) object to

having the property listed in the NRHP. The group of fields only shows up for sites where SHPO has a documented opinion from the Keeper.

- **DOE Name**: This is the name of the property as shown on the Keeper's opinion document.
- **DOE Date**: This is the date of the Keeper's opinion.
- **Contributing Status**: This field describes whether the site has been individually determined eligible or is within a district. If the site is within a district, the values will either be Contributing, Non-Contributing, or Unevaluated based on the available documentation. If SHPO staff find or concur that a site is contributing or non-contributing to a district, that status will be in the group of fields named "SHPO Evaluation and Environmental Review Program Status."

State Register: This is a group of fields that describes whether a site is designated in state statute as a historic site or place (Minnesota Statutes 138.57, 138.581, 138.662, 138.664). The group of fields only shows up for sites that are individually designated in state statute or are within the boundary of a property designated in state statute.

- **State Register Name**: This is the name of the property as listed in state statute.
- **State Register Designation Date**: This is the legislative year that the property was added to state statute and therefore designated as a state historic site.
- **Within the Boundaries of a State Register Listed Property** (Options: Individually Listed or Within): this identifies whether a property is individually listed or within a state register property.
- **Repealed in State Statute**: This is the legislative year that the property was removed from state statute.

National Historic Landmark: This is a group of fields that describes whether a site is designated as a National Historic Landmark (NHL) or is within the boundaries of an NHL.

- **National Historic Landmark Name**: This is the name of the property as defined in the National Historic Landmark system and can be slightly different than the name in the NRHP.
- **Listing Date**: This is the date the property was designated as an NHL.
- **Contributing Status**: This field describes whether the site is individually listed or within a district. If the site is within a district, the values will either be Contributing, Non-Contributing, or Unevaluated based on the NHL nomination. If SHPO staff find or concur that a site is contributing or non-contributing to a district, that status will be in the group of fields named "SHPO Evaluation and Environmental Review Program Status."

SHPO Evaluation and Environmental Review Program Status: This is a group of fields that track when SHPO concurs with an eligibility recommendation or determination of eligibility by a federal agency or other entity. It primarily holds eligibility concurrences that originate from the Environmental Review Program (ERP) but also holds eligibility concurrences from the NRHP Program.

- **Individual Resource Evaluation Status** (Options: Eligible for NRHP, Not Eligible for NRHP, Listed in NRHP, Unevaluated, Eligible for the Purposes of Section 106). This field represents SHPO's opinion on a site's eligibility. The value "Eligible for the Purposes of Section 106" means that the site has not been formally evaluated and instead was treated as eligible, i.e. as a historic property, for the purposes of a specific Section 106 review. If this field is blank, then the site is unevaluated.

- **District Inventory Number**: If an archaeological site is within or overlaps a property that has been inventoried in MnSHIP, then the relevant inventory number will be listed in this field. The inventory number can then be used to search MnSHIP to find additional information.
- **District Name**: If an archaeological site is within or overlaps a property that has been inventoried in MnSHIP, then the Historic Name in MnSHIP for that property will be listed in this field.
- **Resource Contributing Status**: This field describes whether the site is individually eligible or listed or within an eligible or listed district. If the site is within a district, the values will either be Contributing, Non-Contributing, or Unevaluated based on the available information.
- **Resource Contributing Date**: This is the date that SHPO provided concurrence or comments on whether a site is contributing or not to a district, if relevant.
- **Eligibility Concurrence Date**: This is the date that SHPO provided concurrence or comments on a site's individual resource evaluation status.
- **ERP Number**: This field lists the SHPO Review Number. This field is used to cross-reference the SHPO concurrence with the relevant Environmental Review Program project review file, which may have more information.
- **Regulatory Framework for SHPO Review** (Options: NHPA (106 or 110), State Review, Technical Assistance, Other, None – NRHP Program). The purpose of this field is for SHPO to track eligibility concurrences by program and relevant law. The values correspond to: National Historic Preservation Act (Section 106 or Section 110); State Statute (primarily 138.40 or 138.665 & 666); as part of a state Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) or state Public Utilities Commission (PUC) project review; for some other reason; or through the NRHP program.

SHPO Comments: This field incudes any notes that SHPO staff want to share with other users about an archaeological site.

SHPO Report Number(s): This field lists report numbers from SHPO's internal Reports database for archaeological reports prepared and submitted to SHPO prior to the re-launch of the OSA Portal in the summer of 2025. A small subset of SHPO reports are now available in the OSA Portal. If there is a number listed in this field, check to see if the report is within the OSA Portal. If not, email DataRequestSHPO@state.mn.us to request a copy of the report. If the report is scanned, it will be shared digitally. If it is not scanned, you may need to request an appointment to view it in person. See SHPO's website for more information.

Attachments: This is where SHPO staff can upload copies of NRHP nominations or other documentation other than survey reports pertaining to an archaeological site.