

FLORIDA WORK STATION
(Florida Station)
27000 S. Florida Canyon
Green Valley
Pima County
Arizona

HALS AZ-29
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

FLORIDA WORK STATION (Florida Station)

HALS NO. AZ-29

Location: 27000 S. Florida Canyon, Green Valley, Pima County, Arizona

Coronado National Forest

31.763078, -110.846070 (Front gate, north side of property, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: Florida Work Station is significant as the administrative site of the Santa Rita Experimental Range (SRER), a roughly 80-square mile area of rangeland operated for over a century as an agricultural and ecological research laboratory. The SRER "...is widely recognized as the first established and oldest continuously operated experimental rangeland facility in the United States" (Price 1976 and McClaran 2003 cited in Gillespie 2015). The establishment of the SRER dates to 1902 and is inextricably linked to Proclamation 468, the second U.S. land protection proclamation enacted by executive order under President Theodore Roosevelt that set aside land for the development of the Santa Rita Forest Reserve. SRER is also intimately connected to the parallel establishment of the US Forest Service and the designation of national forests in Arizona (Boissoneault 2017; Farrell et al. 2009; Gillespie 2015). Joint interest in the long-term effects of 19th century cattle overgrazing and rangeland degradation in Arizona between the University of Arizona (UA), the federal government, and the territorial government in Arizona ultimately led to creation of the SRER (Gillespie 2015).

The Florida Work Station is a complex of buildings and associated landscape features in Florida Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains south of Tucson, Arizona. The Station is located on Coronado National Forest land and is currently operated by the University of Arizona under a special use permit. The majority of the structures were built between 1923 and 1934 and continue to be used for research, administration, and housing for the SRER. The construction of the Florida Work Station began in 1922 with the erection of a structure intended for use as an office and dwelling for the range manager (Gillespie 2003, 2015; Farrell et al., 2009). Development of the site continued sporadically, with the majority of structures and landscape features built between 1923 and 1934.

Construction of Florida Station took place under several Depression-era federal relief building programs, including the Civilian Works Administration (CWA), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) (Gillespie 2003, 2015; Farrell et al. 2009). The station's association with

the first federal research site to study rangeland ecology in the U.S. as well as its association with Depression-era relief programs contributes to the site's eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (Farrell et al. 2009; McDonald cited in Gillespie 2015). Further, the site is illustrative of "...Forest Service administrative site design principles of the second quarter of the twentieth century" (McDonald 1991 cited in Gillespie 2015 and Farrell et al. 2009) and documented as the "...largest Depression-era site on the Coronado National Forest" (Gillespie, 2003).

Description: The Florida Work Station is in southeastern Arizona approximately 20 miles northeast of Sonoita (Santa Cruz County) and about 40 miles southeast of Tucson (Pima County). With an elevation of 4,400' above sea level, it is situated at the base of Florida Canyon in the Santa Rita Mountains at the southern edge of the Santa Rita Experimental Range (Figure 2). Use as the administrative center for the Santa Rita Experimental Range has affected the natural landscape of the Florida Work Station. Its landscape is characteristic of Sonoran Desert chaparral and grasslands zones. Its climate can expect arid conditions with an average rainfall of about 20" at this location. The area has high temperatures and monsoons during the summer months with cool temperatures during the winter months.

The Santa Rita Forest Reserve was established in 1902 on 45,000 acres of "well-forested" land as a response to overgrazing and rangeland degradation. Four-fifths of the Forest Reserve was "mesa and foothills land," including indigenous cacti, perennial bunchgrass, "shrubby" mesquites with "solid" mesquite trees along waterways (Sayre 2003: 2,3). With the construction of the Florida Work Station taking place between 1923 and 1934 and the establishment of an active rangeland research program, it was observed that large numbers of shrubs were displacing natural grasses and cacti, and invasive plant species, such as Lehmann Lovegrass and burrow weed were becoming predominant. Much of the dominance of shrubs in the area is attributed to grazing patterns along waterways over time. The vegetation currently located at the Florida Work Station continues to demonstrate patterns of animal and human activity. The site is located adjacent to the Florida Creek on its east side, and a perennial spring is located about four miles upstream (south) through the canyon.¹ This site contains native shrubs, mesquite trees, prickly pear cacti, agave, and Lehmann Lovegrass as well as some introduced species such as a pomegranate tree, olive tree and oleander shrub. Built elements on site include buildings, roads, masonry and dry stack retaining walls, rock drainage features and rock paths which define the spatial organization of the site.

At the time of its creation under President Theodore Roosevelt the Santa Rita Experimental Range was owned by the Department of the Interior. In 1905 the

¹ Brett Blum, University of Arizona site manager.

Forest Service was created, and ownership was transferred in 1915. In 1988 ownership of the experimental range transferred to the State of Arizona but the Florida Work Station remained with the Forest Service (Gillespie 2015). Funding for the Santa Rita Experimental Range had been declining and the use of cattle had become less significant (Sayre 2003). The land and facilities at Florida Station continue to be owned by the Forest Service but are managed by the University of Arizona under a special use permit. For most of its existence, the function of the Florida Work Station has been the headquarters of the Santa Rita Experimental Range, where the housing, gas station, warehouses, and offices are located.

Under its management by the University of Arizona, its primary functions are for ecological research support, education, outreach, and community engagement. The work station provides laboratory space for research on desert grassland ecology (USDA Forest Service 2011). It hosts groups of all ages for educational programs covering its history and scientific research, based on rangeland science, ecology of semi-arid ecosystems, agriculture, and cattle ranching. For the first 30 years, the focus was on “how to restore forage plants decimated by the cattle boom and how to measure range resources for management and administration” (Sayre 2003). From 1932 to 1945 the focus changed to vegetation: measuring methods, carrying capacity, and revegetation. From 1946 to 1965 the focus remained on revegetation or restoration of native perennial grasses (Sayre 2003). In 1966 the research focus changed to include many new areas including cattle diets, soil nutrients and their importance, and plant root systems. Since 1988, when the management was transferred to the University of Arizona, the interests have moved from livestock production to issues such as climate change, ecological restoration, watersheds, and wildlife (Sayre 2003).

The Florida Work Station was designed and constructed as the headquarters for the Santa Rita Experimental Range (Figure 1). The spatial organization and cluster arrangement of this district remains largely unchanged since the original site development. The entrance begins with the relocated Old Gas Station, which is likely to be demolished due to its deteriorated condition, and a long driveway which is about 15’ wide up to the central common area. The central area is made up of the administration buildings, garages, and the caretaker’s house. There is a group of three residential buildings on the west side of the site at a higher elevation than the center. At the top or southern end of the site are the warehouses and water tanks. The southern boundary is delineated by the fence behind the deconstructed warehouse; the west boundary by a path behind the cottages; the east is the trail just beyond Florida Creek; and to the north is the entrance gate.

The northern entrance of the Florida Work Station features the Front Gate. It has two stone masonry walls about 3’ tall with 7’ tall pillars about 15’ apart for vehicle and visitor access. The pillar to the west says, “Santa Rita Experimental

Range,” and the pillar to the east says, “University of Arizona” (Figure 3). Behind the western pillar and wall sits a large three-trunked Oak tree. It is also pictured in a 1937 photo of the same entrance to the Florida Work Station facing south. The Old Gas Station is located southwest of the Front Gate. It is a wooden structure that is dilapidated and no longer retains its integrity. It was relocated from south of the site where the Old Gas Pump is located to its current location. Southwest is a fork in the USFS trail. Along the eastern USFS trail a possibly contributing reddish-brown wooden post is located under a mesquite tree. Further south on the western side of the trail there is a rocky, grassy drainage lined with Oak trees running downhill along the trail.

Located closest to the western USFS trail is the contributing C-14 Office built in February of 1932 by the U.S. Forest Service. It has yellowish brown siding with brownish trim and has an open porch with two entrances and a non-contributing metal roof. In 1934 it was whitish with dark trim and window awning canopy coverings for windows. Its purpose has not changed but it is being considered as a place for residence or an Interpretive Center (“Florida Station: Planning the Next Century”: 23). Directly north of this dwelling is a flagpole with a dry-stacked stone base (Figure 4). North of the flagpole is a masonry retaining wall about 3’ in height. There are four steps embedded in this retaining wall that reach into the hill north. There is a terrace with a tree surrounded by a low stone wall southeast of the house. On the hill south of the Office is a dry-stacked stone wall. Southwest of this location is a weathered, white wooden box housing a thermometer gauge with a metal base (Figure 5). It is a contributing structure. In the same region is a mortared stone path on an overgrown, grassy hill. West of the Office is a stone path mortared in place approximately 9’ wide with a stone drain embedded towards the bottom leading uphill towards dwellings. Along the northwestern site boundary is a vista with a gravel pad area ringed with stone. There is a tree with a constructed tree well with a depth of approximately 2’.

Along the western side of the USFS Trail is a depressed transition from asphalt to dirt leading northwest away from the trail. It appears to be used for flood or water control. The southeastern side of the road is lined with rocks. There is a rock-lined path that leads through the woodland area to the Florida Creek. At the end of this path is a weathered hollow concrete barrel. Florida Creek is beyond, including a small pool of water which may be used as a watering hole. Along the eastern edge of the site boundary is a concrete pad that may have functioned as structure foundation. Directly south of the concrete pad is a weathered cement water trough, which is 8’-2” x 3’-8” x 2’-1” (Figure 6). There is an additional larger path leading from Florida Creek west towards the trail lined with stone which is about 6’ wide. This leads towards the Office. The eastern side of the trail has dry stacked retaining walls that support this path. There is a “C” on top (Figure 12). The path below this feature is an asphalt road that leads to the trail and Office. West of the trail is the flat parking area. East of the parking area are sycamore (*Platanus wrightii*) and juniper (*Juniperus californica*) trees. West of

the parking area is a masonry stone retaining wall that surrounds the C-6 Martin House. The C-6 Martin house is a contributing building constructed during June of 1931 by the US Forest Service. Today it has yellowish brown side paneling and brown trim with a green metal roof that is non-contributing. It has an enclosed porch entrance and is used as housing (“Florida Station: Planning the Next Century”: 19). West of the Martin House is a dry stack retaining wall split by an oak tree.

The C-5 Bunk House is located southwest of the C-6 Martin House. It is a contributing structure that was built during the May of 1931 by the US Forest Service. Its interior and exterior were remodeled during the late 1980s. It has white paneling with green trim and a green metal roof with an open porch at the entrance. It is used for housing (“Florida Station: Planning the Next Century”: 18). Northwest of this building is a wooden paneled door embedded in a masonry stone wall. Southwest of the C-5 Bunk House is a terraced hill with stone stairs leading up to the terrace (Figure 13).

Moving southeast from C-5 Bunk House is the C-19 Administrator’s Office/ Dwelling. It was built during June of 1926 by the US Forest Service and was remodeled during the winter of 1931-32 by the agency. At the time it was white with a dark trim and had vines growing along the exterior walls on the eastern and northern sides, as noted from a 1934 picture. Today it has dark wooden side paneling with brown trim and a green metal roof. It is used for housing (“Florida Station: Planning the Next Century,” 22). Across the USFS Trail east is the C-9 Officer-In-Charge Dwelling. It was built during December 1923 by the US Forest Service and was remodeled during the January of 1934 by Works Progress Administration (WPA). It was white with a darkish trim. It has a Gambrel-form porch extension. It has a masonry stone chimney which is included in a photo from 1936 (“Florida Station: Planning the Next Century,” 21). Today it is white with green trim and a green metal roof. It is used as the station manager's dwelling (Figure 7).

In the central area there is a building which is currently used as the Classroom (C-17 on Figure 1). This is where educational outreach takes place. It was previously used for carpentry. Across the road is the building which is currently the bathrooms. It was where the gas station was located before its transfer to the front of the site. The original gas pump is still standing in the front. It is dark red and is 5’-6” tall. Next to it is the C-18 Main Garage (C-18 on Figure 1). This building’s current use is storage for tools and other maintenance equipment. It was previously used for the main garage. The exterior has remained the same with the exception of the roof, which has been updated. All buildings were renovated with the same green metal roofs to prevent further damage.

Moving from the center to the west is the residential area. Going from south to north, first is the C-24 Cottage (C-24 on Figure 1). Due to its location along the

hillside, the front foundation of the home is raised to be level with the back half. This foundation is made of stone and mortar masonry which is similar to the retaining wall alongside the road. The second cottage is the C-29 Cottage (C-29 on Figure 1). It is located further back from the road than the other cottages and has a stone masonry path to the front door. There are stone masonry retaining walls terracing the front of the cottage. On the exterior there is a stone patio. The third cottage is the C-25 Cottage (C-25 on Figure 1; Figure 7). This cottage has a fenced-in side yard with non-native plants including an olive tree (*Olea europaea*) and oleander (*Nerium oleander*) on the left side. On the right side is a stone masonry staircase leading to a small masonry slab outside the door. The right side also houses a pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) tree. This cottage has a stone and mortar foundation similar to the C-24 Cottage. These cottages have had the same use since their creation, but some features have been modified on both interior and exterior, where the roof was replaced with a green metal roof and half-circle gutters were added.

Moving to the south, there are two storage garages, C-7 and C-22 (C-7 and C-22, respectively, on Figure 1), parallel across the path from one another. Located next to these garages is one of two water tanks (Figure 8). This tank is the older of the two tanks on site, estimated to date back to the 1930s. This metal tank was previously used as a fish tank and has since been used to provide water to the site for fire remediation. At the southernmost end of the site (upper part of the site), there was another warehouse, but it was removed due to the lack of maintenance and integrity. All that remains is a 20' x 40' slab where it once stood (C-23 on Figure 1).

Stone masonry including dry rock and stone and mortar are prevalent throughout the site due to the easy availability of materials. Along the exterior of the roads, buildings, and along the hillside are stone masonry retaining walls. Some are dry stone masonry and others are stone and mortar masonry (Figure 9). These walls navigate the circular path around the site along the cottages, warehouse, and extra walkways. In the central area there are three trees all, with stone tree wells surrounding them. One tree, located next to the bathrooms, has a modern fire hose inside the ring. Another, more central, has nothing inside the ring. The third tree, located outside the C-17 Classroom, has a stone water spigot (Figure 10).

A modern addition to the site is the picnic area located between the Classroom and the creek, with stone and mortar masonry retaining walls surrounding the benches. This area includes a historic stone barbeque grill to the side of the non-contributing picnic seating area (Figure 1).

History: The Santa Rita Mountain range, located 40 miles southeast of Tucson, Arizona, has been the site of subsistence and settlement activity and cultural life for Indigenous communities for thousands of years (Buttery 1987). The mountain range is a traditional cultural property (TCP) of the Tohono O'odham and is

acknowledged as a place of traditional cultural importance to the Western Apache, the Chiricahua Apache, the Hopi, the Zuni, and the Pascua Yaqui (Griset et al. 2012). Spanish explorers and missionaries introduced livestock to the area in the late 17th century and subsequent settlement by Hispanic families (Griset et al. 2012) established ranching culture and land-use traditions to the area. This has made the area of historic cultural significance to many multi-generational and multi-cultural Spanish-Mexican and Mexican-American ranching families, a few of whom still own and operate historic ranches located at the base of the Santa Rita Mountains today. After the Gadsden Purchase (1854) and with the Homestead Act (1862) many Anglo and international investors recognized the economic potential of ranching, mining, and other agricultural and commercial enterprises in the Santa Rita Mountains and settled in the area.

During the U.S. Territorial Period in Southern Arizona (1848-1912) a series of executive orders and federal acts issued under presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt were enacted to both secure and preserve public land in southern Arizona for the United States. These resulted in the creation of the Santa Rita Forest Reserve (SRFR) in 1902, later absorbed into the Coronado National Forest (CNF), a two-million-acre, noncontiguous national forest, in 1908. As early as 1900, a joint interest developed between the U.S. government and scientists at the University of Arizona (UA) in the study of rangeland degradation in southern Arizona. Drastic changes in the landscape and lack of productivity was thought to be a result of a cattle boom in the 1880s. This boom coincided with the arrival of the Southern Pacific Railroad in southern Arizona, which transformed the scale cattle and other livestock ranching in the Arizona Territory. Excessive overstocking and overgrazing, alongside sustained patterns of drought nearly decimated the native landscape in rangeland areas (Ruyle 2003).

Early advocates for U.S. land preservation for the purpose of study in southern Arizona include Gifford Pinchot, head of the newly created Bureau of Forestry (1901), David Griffiths of the Bureau of Plant Industry (1901) and former professor of botany at the UA Experiment Station (established 1890), and Robert H. Forbes, Director of the UA Agricultural Experiment Station (1900) (Gillespie 2003, 2015). Of particular importance to this history is Pinchot's decision to hire recognized "range expert" Albert F. Potter to survey and ultimately recommend to the U.S. government the interested parties' desired study area to be included in SRFR. Consequently, the SRFR constitutes "the first major withdrawal of public lands in southern Arizona" (Gillespie, 2003) by proclamation of President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902. This series of decisions and subsequent actions are counted among many "firsts" in the history of forestry, grazing policy, and the scientific study of rangelands in the U.S. (Gillespie 2015).

Santa Rita Experimental Range

The Santa Rita Experimental Range is the longest continuously active rangeland research facility and among the five oldest biological field stations in the United States (Gillespie 2015; Farrell et al. 2009). In 1902 the Bureau of Plant Industry and the UA Agricultural Experiment Station entered into a joint use agreement for “cooperative research” on the SRFR. At the time, the reserve was under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of the Interior’s General Land Office (GLO). By 1902 fences were erected and livestock removed to begin work on the unofficially named U.S. Range Reserve (Gillespie 2015). Removal of livestock necessitated negotiation with local ranchers and the permitted lease and use of designated parcels of rangeland. Permitting and grazing agreements for the area established in the early 20th century have transferred through inheritance and sale into the present day and have significantly contributed to long-term research on the range.

In the preceding years, the SRFR land boundaries periodically shifted as administration of the land was subject to a series of transfers through U.S. federal agencies as a result of reorganization and consolidation of federal land, public land use, and government agencies. During this time, scientific research on the reserve continued uninterrupted (Gillespie 2003, 2015; Farrell et al. 2009). The passing of the McSweeney-McNary Act in 1928 funded a dozen experiment stations on federal forest land throughout the U.S. and by 1930, the SRFR was absorbed into the newly created Southwestern Forest and Range Experiment Station and renamed the Santa Rita Experimental Range (SRER) (Gillespie 2015). The SRER remained under the control of the U.S. Forest Service (FS) until 1987 when it was transferred to the Arizona State Land Department (AZLD) with management conferred to the UA by special designation of the Arizona State legislature (Gillespie 2015; Sayre 2003).

Florida Station

The history of the Florida Work Station is inextricably linked to the history of SRER (Farrell et al. 2009) despite the shifts in ownership and oversight in its over one-hundred-year existence. SRER operated for many years without a formal headquarters. FS examiner in charge of the range, Robert L. Hill lived in the nearby town of Continental, Arizona (Farrell et al. 2009). Meanwhile, all necessary operations were carried out at the Florida Canyon ranch home of William McCleary, an employee of the Bureau of Plant Industry and the appointed caretaker of the SRER. McCleary was an industrious local rancher and miner who had established a connection to the SRER by securing a fence-building contract that resulted in the enclosure of the original 49 square miles of the SRER surveyed in 1903 by Mark Walker from Tucson, Arizona (Gillespie 2003). By 1920, the SRER was in search of a new location for a proper headquarters, and a new cooperative agreement between the University of Arizona and the FS, finalized in 1921, allocated funds to construct “a house for use as office and dwelling” (Gillespie 2003, 2009). Construction at the new site,

located along Florida Canyon on CNF land, was overseen by FS examiner and grazing manager, Matthew Culley, who arrived at SRER in 1922. The first structure built on the site was the Officer in Charge building, C-9 (Gillespie 2009), which still stands today and serves the same purpose nearly 100 years later.

Under Culley, development of the site progressed between 1923 and 1934 due in large part to the assistance of several Depression-era federal relief building programs (Gillespie 2003, 2015). At least twenty structures were completed under various relief programs during this period. Associated landscape features such as "...retaining walls, an entrance gate, an icehouse, and surfaced roads within the station..." (Farrell et al. 2009, p. 6) were constructed by Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) crews who worked extensively on the SRER. This association with numerous depression-era federal relief programs makes the site eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NHR) under Criteria A (Gillespie, 2015). Today, the Florida Work Station is noted as the largest and "...arguably best preserved..." depression-era administrative site on the CNF (Gillespie 2015, p. 17). In a 2009 "Proposed Restoration and Rehabilitation" report prepared by the CNF Nogales Ranger District, the authors remark: "Individually, each of the buildings retains integrity of location, setting, and association, and most of them retain integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and feeling" (Farrell et al. 2009, p. 1). Moreover, collectively as an archetypal FS administrative site organization and building design for the period of significance lends to the site's eligibility for listing on the NRHP (Gillespie 2015).

The Florida Work Station maintains its nearly one-hundred-year relationship with the UA who jointly operates the site under special use permit issued by the FS. In recent years, select buildings have been stabilized and modestly rehabilitated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings using funds allocated from another federal program: the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) (Gillespie 2015; Farrell et al. 2009). Support of this effort demonstrates an ongoing commitment by the U.S. federal government in maintaining the historic character and structural integrity of Florida Station and support of its association with the first and longest continuously operating rangeland conservation and ecological research site. Recent initiatives to rehabilitate and extend use of the site will contribute to increasing opportunities for public education, ensuring that a century after inception and continuous operation, extant structures and landscape elements at the Florida Work Station retain their character defining features for future use and interpretation.

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Historians: Report completed by students in LAR 497j/597j Interpretation and Documentation of the Historic Built Environment, University of Arizona, Spring 2021 semester.

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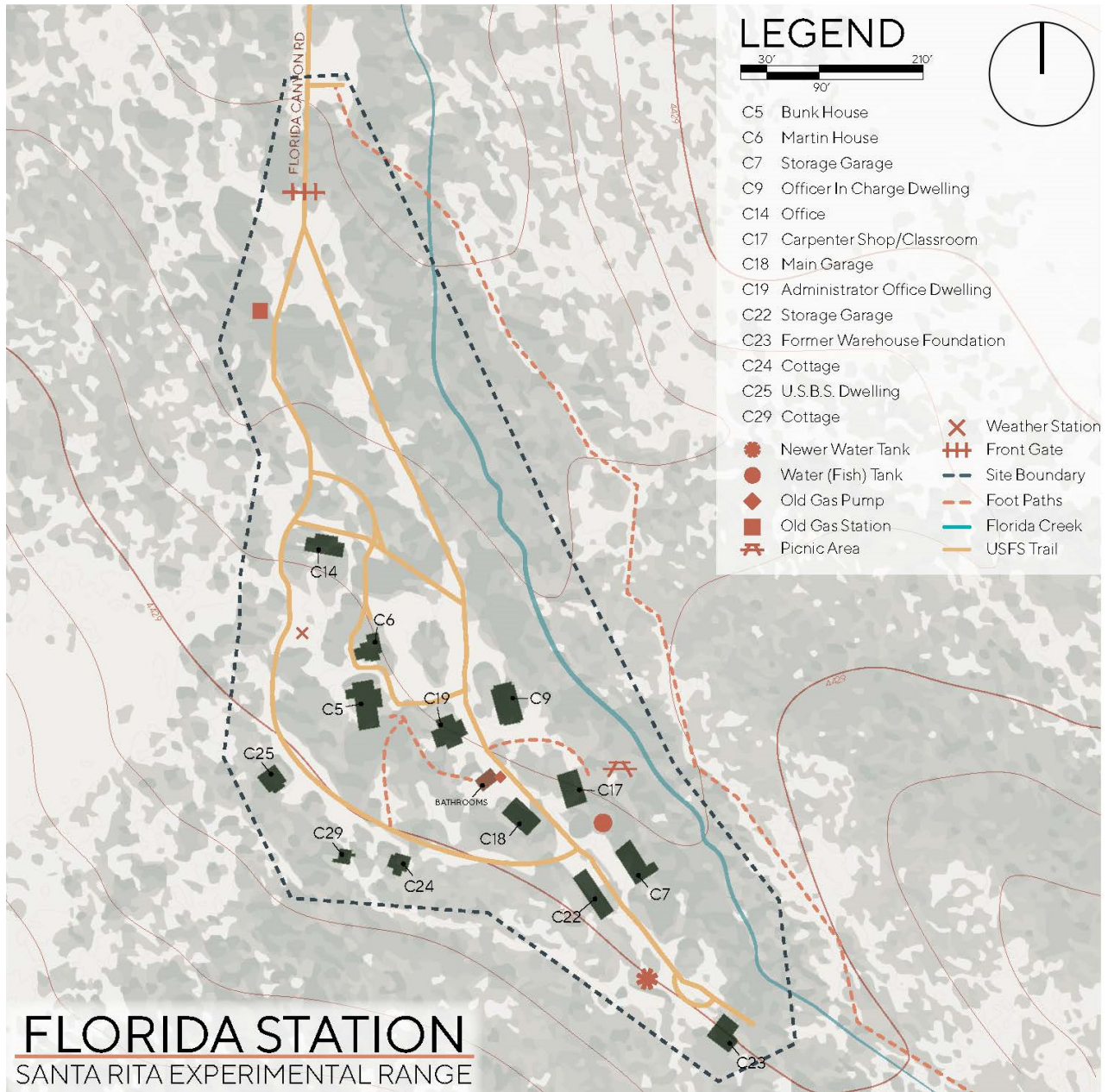


FIGURE 1 – Map of the Florida Workstation and surrounding area, prepared by Lauran Morrissey and Estefania Peña Pesqueira.



FIGURE 2 - View shed and retaining wall below USBS Cottage (C25) facing southeast, photo by Sarah McDowell, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 3 - Historic stone masonry entrance gate, facing south, photo by Melanie Olson, 02/06/2

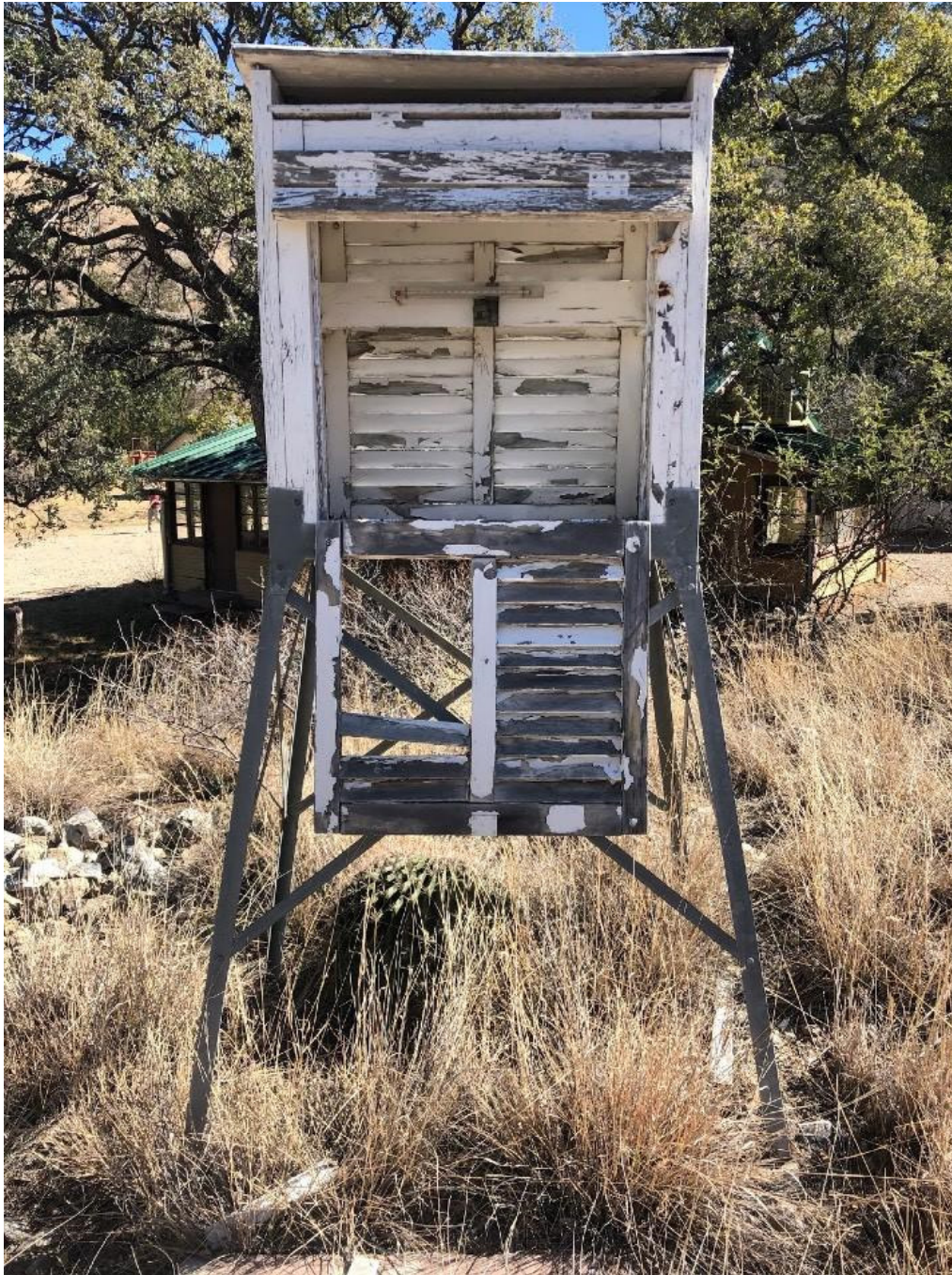


FIGURE 4 - White wooden box with weather gauge, metal base. Facing southeast, photo by Melanie Olson, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 5 - Concrete water trough facing southeast, photo by Melanie Olson, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 6 - Caretaker's house (C-9) facing northeast, photo by Melanie Olson, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 7 - USFS cottage C25, retaining walls, foundation, building, and yard facing northwest, photo by Sarah McDowell, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 8 - “Non-potable water” tank, and masonry rain drainage feature, facing northwest, photo by Sarah McDowell, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 9 - Example of dry stacked stone wall below admin building facing northwest, photo by Melanie Olson, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 10 - Water spigot and tree with stone ring in front of classroom (C17) facing northeast, photo by Sarah McDowell, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 11 - Historic barbeque/grill near non-contributing picnic area, animal water tank in background facing southwest, photo by Sarah McDowell, 02/06/21.



FIGURE 12 - Retaining Walls, view from path off the main road to swimming hole, facing southwest. Sketch by Safia Ahmed Francis, done in graphite and watercolor.



FIGURE 13 - Stone Stairs, leading up to the upper cabins facing southwest. Sketch by Safia Ahmed Francis, done in graphite and watercolor.

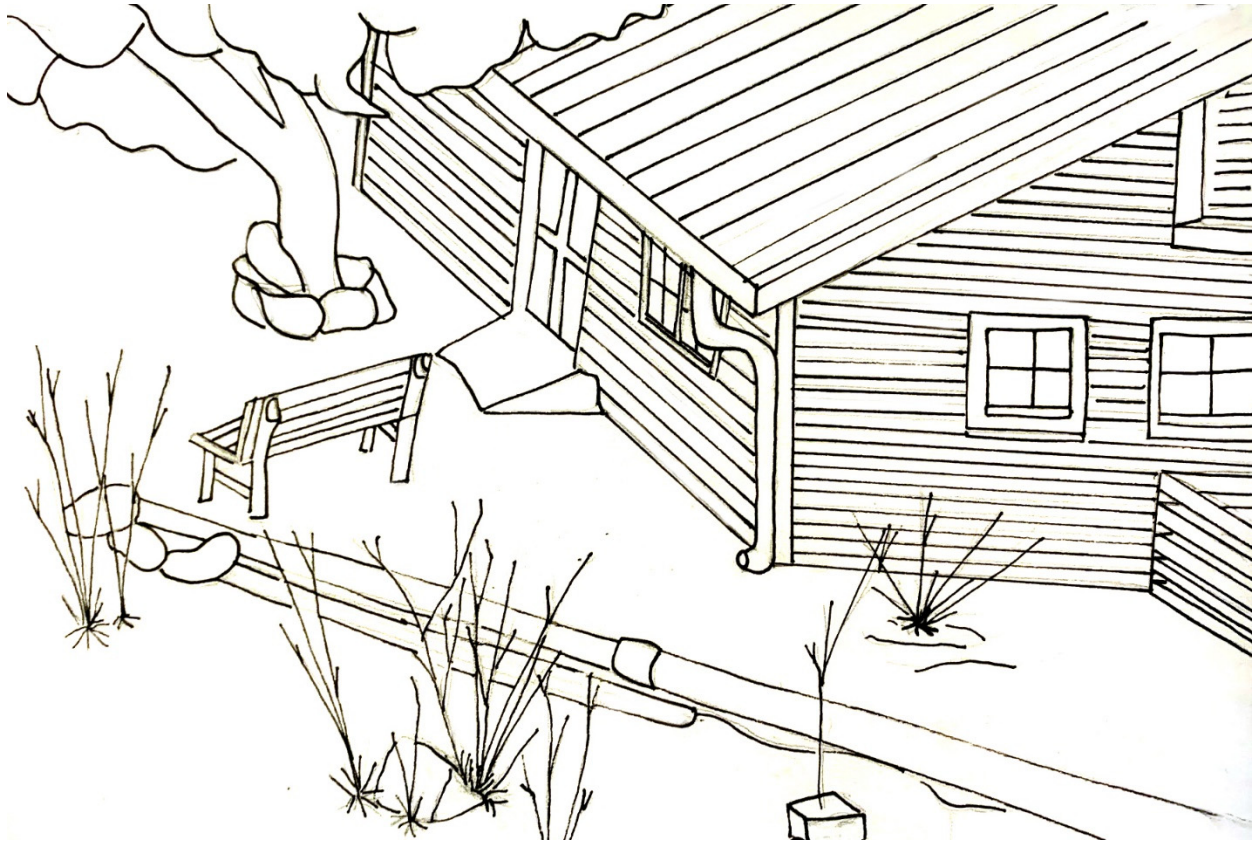


FIGURE 14 - Education building near the center of the site with large oak tree in stone planter and a new metal bench, facing northeast. Sketch by Lauran Morrissey.



FIGURE 15 – Cottage (C29) cement steps and the retaining wall around it, facing southwest.
Sketch by Lauran Morrissey.