Magnetic Prospection and Section 106 of the NHPA Compliance: A Case Study from Ross County, Ohio
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The National Historic Preservation Act (NRHP) and the Section 106 review process is a key component of commercial archaeology in the United States. This process is triggered through federal involvement in a project (e.g. partnership, funding, permitting, etc.). Section 106 compliance generally comprises three “Phases”, though the vast majority of projects satisfy the review process in the first phase (Phase 1) and therefore never go to the second or third phase of archaeological survey. While geophysical survey, in particular magnetometry and ground penetrating radar, are typically recommended by State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) as the first component of the second phase (Phase II), the recommendation for geophysical survey for Phase I archaeological survey is largely absent. Terracon Consultants, Inc., in consultation with the Ohio SHPO proposed and executed a landscape-scale magnetic prospection Phase I archaeological survey for Section 106 compliance in November 2024. This work, the first of its kind in Ohio, demonstrates that magnetic prospection is not only a viable alternative to more traditional Phase I surveys, but is a more systematic, comprehensive, and effective survey methodology, given appropriate field conditions. This geophysical survey identified over 3,600 potential precontact anomalies and, through classification and geospatial analysis of those anomalies, 44 new sites were added to the Ohio Archeological Inventory (OAI).