

**MNDOT HISTORIC ROADSIDE DEVELOPMENT  
STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

CA-TOR-002  
CS 1104

Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area

<b>Historic Name</b>	Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area	<b>CS #</b>	1104
<b>Other Name</b>	No-ta-she-bun Public Water Access	<b>SHPO Inv #</b>	CA-TOR-002

<b>Location</b>	SE side of TH 6 3.3 mi S of CSAH 28	<b>Hwy</b>	TH 6
<b>City/Township</b>	Torrey Township	<b>District</b>	3A
<b>County</b>	Cass	<b>Reference</b>	66.0

<b>Twp Rng Sec</b>	143N 25W Sec 36	<b>Acres</b>	15
<b>USGS Quad</b>	Sugar Lake	<b>Rest Area Class</b>	4
<b>UTM</b>	Z15 E441050 N5222650		

<b>Designer</b>	Nichols, A R, Consult Land Arch	<b>SP #</b>	6-34-126-2A 1104-04
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<b>Builder</b>	Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)	<b>SHPO Review #</b>	
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<b>Historic Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area	<b>MHS Photo #</b>	013557.14-24 013561.16-23 013562.02-09
<b>Present Use</b>	Roadside Parking Area		

<b>Yr of Landscape Design</b>	1938-41	<b>MnDOT Historic Photo Album</b>	Nic 1.17 Nic 5.21 Ols 1.21
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<b>Overall Site Integrity</b>	Intact/Slightly Altered		
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<b>Review Required</b>	Yes		
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<b>National Register Status</b>	Eligible, see Statement of Significance		
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<b>Historic Context</b>	Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960		
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**List of Standing Structures**

Feat#	Feature Type	Year Built	
01	Overlook Wall	1939-40	
02	Curb, Stone	1939-40	
03	Bathhouse	1939-40	
04	Foundation of Bldg	1939-40	
05	Well/Pump	Ca. 1940	

<b>Fieldwork Date</b>	08-09-97
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<b>Prep by</b>	Gemini Research Dec. 98 G1. 85
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<b>Prep for</b>	Site Development Unit Cultural Resources Unit Environmental Studies Unit
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NOTE: Landscape features are not listed in this table

<b>Final Report</b>	Historic Roadside Development Structures on Minnesota Trunk Highways (1998)
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■ BRIEF

The Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area is a 15-acre site that is located on the eastern side of T.H. 6 about 3.3 miles south of C.S.A.H. 28. The site is about 9 miles north of Remer.

■ STANDING STRUCTURES

**Stone Overlook.** Built 1939-1940 by the CCC. The principal structure on the site is a 300'-long, asymmetrical stone overlook wall standing in a forested area on the western shore of Willow Lake. The wall is built of carefully-chosen, randomly-laid pink, light gray, and dark gray split granite rocks (probably local fieldstone and lake boulders). The wall's piers are built of random ashlar, roughly-cut red granite. The wall footings are built of stone and concrete. The wall has a large semicircular curve, straight endwalls, and a rectangular lookout bay and stairway near the curve's apex. The wall varies in height with the terrain and is stepped in some portions. The western face is about 33" to 40" tall above the parking area. Viewed from below, the wall is massive, with an eastern face varying from 7' to 12' tall. The wall is 18" thick and anchored at intervals with 20 piers (18 of which are 28" square and 2 of which are polygonal). The northern endwall is about 75' long and stepped, while the southern endwall is about 21' long. A thin, smooth, poured concrete cap has been added to the top of the wall. The western side of the wall (facing the parking area) is lined with a grassy, 4'-wide walkway edged with stone curbing. The grassy walkway was originally gravel.

The 32'-wide rectangular lookout bay projects about 9' to create a rectangular terrace that has been paved with asphalt. A 21'-long stairway, with stone sidewalls and 6'-wide poured concrete steps, descends from the terrace. There is a 6' by 6' poured concrete landing midway down the stairs and a similar concrete pad at the bottom. The overlook wall serves as the western sidewall of the staircase, and the staircase has a 28"-tall, 18"-thick eastern sidewall. A gravel walkway leads from the base of the stairs down to the lakeshore. Historic photos show that this walkway originally had gravel and log trail steps that began a few feet from the base of the steps.

**Stone Curbing.** Built 1939-1940 by the CCC. Intact granite curbing lines the grassy island and highway pull-off drive west of the overlook wall. Portions of the curbing are overgrown.

**Bathhouse.** Built 1939-1940 by the CCC. In the dense trees south of the overlook wall near the lakeshore is a log bathhouse that sits on a poured concrete pad (probably a replacement pad). The house measures approximately 12' by 24'. It is built of round logs that are about 14" in diameter and have been painted brown. The gabled roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The interior is divided into two changing rooms. The interior has been whitewashed. One concrete step leads into each room.

**Remains of Log Observation Tower.** Built 1939-1940 by the CCC. About 45' east of the northern end of the overlook wall are what appear to be the remains of the log observation tower. The remains consist of an earthen mound and portions of three sets of steps made of short pieces of granite.

**Metal Pump.** Erected circa 1940. A 3'-tall red metal pump is located in the former picnic area (now the boat launch area) at the southern end of the site. It sits on a 4'-square

concrete pad just north of the parking area. The pump handle has been removed. Lettering on the metal pump reads: "Duplex Manufacturing Co., Superior, Wisconsin. P323. Made in U.S.A."

■ **OTHER LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND PLANTINGS**

The site is divided into two units. The stone overlook wall is located on a high point near the northern end of the site, and the boat launch area is located near the southern end of the site. The two areas are separated by a heavily wooded area that is about 1,500' long. There was originally a swimming beach at the lakeshore about half-way between the two units.

The stone overlook is served by an asphalt-paved highway pull-off drive and parking area. There is an oval-shaped grassy island between T.H. 6 and the drive. Both the island and the drive are lined with granite curbs. Three large, 40-year-old maples are planted in the island.

The overlook area is heavily wooded with oak, birch, evergreens, and other trees. A few feet north of the overlook wall there was originally a circular log observation tower (built 1939-1940, razed). East of the overlook wall, the land gently slopes down toward Willow Lake, which is screened by dense woods and currently not visible from the wall. A gravel path (originally with trail steps) leads down to the lake. Along the shore are the remains of a gravel and asphalt service road (marked on the original plans as "old tote road" -- tote means to carry or haul) that ran along the shoreline. Approximately 200' south of the overlook's entrance drive is an asphalt-paved road that leads from T.H. 6 down to the lakeshore, and then curves north where it joins the lakeshore service road and footpath.

The bathhouse and former swimming beach are located about 160' south of the overlook wall. The bathhouse is about 45' west of the lakeshore.

The original picnic area, located about 1,500' south of the overlook wall, is now a boat launch area leased by the DNR. The original plans specify that the picnic area have a rectangular gravel parking area, two privies, a well, several picnic tables, and several picnic fireplaces. The plan shows a polygonal structure south of the parking area that may have been a picnic shelter. (A shelter is also mentioned in a 1939 report of the construction.)

Today, the picnic area's gravel parking area is discernible and the well's pump still exists. A depression and the remains of a concrete footing are visible at the approximate location of the original picnic shelter. There is a latrine hole about 65' west of this depression. An approximately 100'-wide gravel entrance drive enters the area from T.H. 6, and continues east approximately 350' where it ends at a concrete boat launch and dock. West of the boat launch, the drive circles around a grassy island that has an evergreen tree and a wooden sign. The sign reads: "No-ta-she-bun Public Water Access. Property of Projects between Minnesota Department of Transportation and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources." Three timber posts on the southern side of the gravel drive block the entrance to the original gravel parking area. The site is surrounded by a dense growth of natural forest.

■ **SETTING**

The site is bounded on all sides by forest. It is surrounded on the west by the Chippewa National Forest and T.H. 6, on the east by Willow Lake, and on the north and south by the Remer State Forest. The Ojibwe name for Willow Lake is No-ta-she-bun Lake.

■ **INTEGRITY**

**Alterations**

The site appears to have been built fairly close to plan.

Northern unit: A thin, smooth, poured concrete cap has been added to the top of the wall. The wall has been patched with new mortar. Two metal hooks have been added to the wall of the lookout bay (purpose unknown). The terrace within the lookout bay has been paved with asphalt (it was originally gravel). The walkway along the western side of the wall is now planted with grass (it was originally gravel). The highway pull-off at the overlook wall has been paved with asphalt. The once-spectacular view of the lake from the overlook wall is now blocked by dense trees. The trail steps along the trail from the overlook wall to the lakeshore are gone. The log observation tower north of the overlook wall has been razed.

Bathhouse: The poured concrete pad under the bathhouse appears to have been replaced. The roof has been shingled with asphalt.

Southern unit: The picnic area near the southern end of the site has been converted to a boat launch area with a circular gravel drive, a concrete boat ramp, and a dock. The original gravel parking area is now a clearing in the woods. The picnic shelter, tables, and fireplaces are gone.

Despite the changes listed above, in general the site retains overall integrity of location, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The integrity of design has been compromised by the changes to the southern unit, but the site's wooded setting, layout, and the good design integrity in the northern unit create an overall strength of integrity for the site.

**Notes on Condition**

The wall is in fair condition. It has been repaired in the past with sloppy mortar work. A few of the concrete steps are broken and the rebar is exposed. The view from the overlook wall is now blocked with trees. People are using the area behind the northern endwall as a dump ground. An old stove, other metal debris, and garbage have been dumped there.

The granite curbing around the semicircular grassy island is in good condition, but the curbing in front of the overlook wall is in poor condition and overgrown with grass and weeds.

The log bathhouse is in fair condition. Some of the ends of the logs are rotting or broken and paint on the eastern side is peeling. The shingles are in poor condition.

## ■ HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area was constructed in the Chippewa National Forest in 1938-1941 by Camp F-46 of the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC). The CCC was working in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Highways and was under the supervision of the U.S. Forest Service. The highway department furnished the plans, material, and equipment, and the Forest Service supervised the project and furnished the labor. The original plans were drawn in 1938. One sheet was signed in February 1938 and another in August 1938. The plans were signed by Harold E. Olson (Engineer of Roadside Development), A. R. Nichols (Consulting Landscape Architect), O. L. Kipp (Construction Engineer), and A. W. Moulster (District Engineer). The final plans are stamped: "Final Plans Construction Division Forestry Program June 3, 1942."

CCC Camp F-46 was located near the town of Remer, nine miles south of the Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area. The men of CCC Camp F-46 apparently built the site over a three and one-half year period. In 1938, the CCC cleared and grubbed the overlook area and about 30 acres of lakeshore. By the end of that year, 8 acres had been cleaned, 1 acre had been cleared, and 1 acre grubbed (*Annual Report 1938:22*).

The next year, the Highway Department's *Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development* stated:

This project consists of the development of a roadside parking area with picnicking facilities and includes a stonemasonry concourse, a log observation tower, shelter, and foot trails. The area lies between Willow Lake and the Trunk Highway and is a natural stopping point for travellers in that vicinity. It is contemplated that this project will be completed during 1940 (*Annual Report 1939:10*).

According to the report, the 1939 work included the cleanup of 1.1 acres and the construction of 2,200 lineal feet of trails.

After the site was completed, it was jointly maintained by the U.S. Forest Service and the Minnesota Department of Highways, with the Forest Service providing routine maintenance and the highway department providing repairs. After 1957, the highway department assumed all maintenance (Olson 1959).

The Site Development Unit files indicate that in 1961 there were 10 picnic tables, five fireplaces, four toilets, bathhouses, and water at the site.

A limited use permit was granted to the Department of Natural Resources in 1990 for water access and parking in the southern portion of the site. Apparently the DNR altered the site at that time, converting it into a boat launch area.

## ■ PREVIOUS SHPO REVIEWS

There have apparently been no previous cultural resource reviews of this property.

**■ STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Willow Lake R.P.A., built in 1938-1941 by the CCC, is a roadside parking area with a complex site design. The stone overlook wall is one of 37 stone overlook walls recorded in this inventory. The log bathhouse is unique in the inventory. Willow Lake is one of 14 sites in the inventory known, or suspected, to have been built by the CCC. The overlook is one of more than 60 sites in the inventory that were designed by, or whose design is attributed to, Arthur R. Nichols.

This property has been evaluated within the historic context "Roadside Development on Minnesota Trunk Highways, 1920-1960." It is recommended that the Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area is ELIGIBLE for the National Register under this historic context because it meets the following registration requirements:

Rare Federal Relief Property Type. The log bathhouse at the Willow Lake R.P.A. is one of few examples of this property type that were ever built by the Roadside Development Division. (National Register Criterion A.)

Significant to the History of Roadside Development. The Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area is among the 68 Depression-era properties in the inventory that represent the MHD's first large-scale effort to construct roadside development facilities in the state. The site is important as a well-preserved example of the work of the CCC in cooperation with the MHD. The property is an example of the distinctive and well-constructed public facilities, built by the MHD in partnership with federal relief agencies, that met the objectives of roadside development while providing essential work and job training to the nation's unemployed during the Depression. (National Register Criterion A.)

Design Significance. The Willow Lake R.P.A. has a large, well-preserved example of one of the more elaborate stone overlook walls built by the Roadside Development Division. The wall is an excellent example of the application of the "National Park Service Rustic Style" to a roadside development facility. It has unusual masonry of excellent quality. The wall displays the special labor-intensive construction techniques and distinctive use of indigenous materials that characterize both the Rustic style and federal relief construction in Minnesota. Furthermore, the Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area is an important example of the roadside development work of prominent landscape architect A. R. Nichols. (National Register Criterion C.)

The property may also be associated with the "Federal Relief Construction, 1933-1943" and "Tourism and Recreation in the Lake Regions, 1870-1945" historic contexts.

**■ OTHER COMMENTS**

This property may require further evaluation for potential archaeological resources.

The DNR has a limited use permit for water access and parking.

T.H. 6 is fairly quiet past this site.

■ **REFERENCES**

Anderson, Rolf T. "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1941." National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form. Oct. 9, 1990, amended Aug. 30, 1993.

Anderson, Rolf T. "Minnesota State Park CCC/WPA/Rustic Style Historic Resources." National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form. Sept. 3, 1988.

*Annual Report of the Accomplishments of Roadside Development Along the Trunk Highways in Minnesota.* Minnesota Department of Highways. 1938 and 1939.

Matson, Keith. Memo to Christy Caine. April 3, 1986. [Copy in SHPO files and in this Mn/DOT site inventory file.]

McClelland, Linda Flint. *Presenting Nature: The Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service, 1916-1942.* Washington, D.C.: U. S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1993.

Olson, Harold E. (Engineer of Roadside Development). Memo to A. W. Moulster, (District Engineer). July 23, 1959.

Rose, Nancy E. *Put To Work. Relief Programs in the Great Depression.* New York: Monthly Review Press, 1994.

Site Plans. Minnesota Department of Transportation, St. Paul.

Tweton, Jerome D. *The New Deal at the Grass Roots. Programs for the People in Otter Tail County, Minnesota.* St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988.

■ **ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Willow Lake Roadside Parking Area is within the Chippewa National Forest and the Remer State Forest. The Chippewa National Forest was established in 1908. It covers a large area in the northern part of Cass County and a portion of northwestern Itasca County. The Chippewa, Cass Lake, and Winnebagoish Indian Reservations lie within the forest boundaries.

Remer Township and the railroad town of Remer were named for brothers E. N. and William P. Remer. William Remer was the first postmaster in town, and E. N. Remer was the manager of the Reishus-Remer Land Company in Grand Rapids.