

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: United States Forest Service, Remer District Ranger Station

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing:

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1943

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 307 Main Street East

City or town: Remer State: MN County: Cass

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ☐ removed from the National Register
- ☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
- Public – Local ☐
- Public – State ☐
- Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
- District ☐
- Site ☐
- Structure ☐
- Object ☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>3</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT: government office

 Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

Remer District Ranger Station
Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota
County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No style

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: _____

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Wood

Roof: Asphalt shingles

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Remer District Ranger Station is located in Chippewa National Forest in the town of Remer, in north-central Minnesota. The station was built to serve as the headquarters for the Remer Ranger District, an administrative unit created in 1935. The nominated property comprises the western portion of the original station property with three contributing buildings: the main office, oil house, and warehouse. The property is located on the south side of E. Main Street (Minnesota Hwy. 200), one block east of Remer's commercial district. (Figures 1 and 2) On the north side of E. Main Street, there is a complex of public schools. There are residences to the east and west of the property. Between the highway and the office, there is a grassy lawn, roughly 100 feet deep (Photo 001) There is a gravel driveway to the office along the west side of the property. (Photo 002) The southern portion of the lot, behind the warehouse, is wooded with a mix of pine and hardwoods.

The Ranger Station is a good example of a Forest Service ranger station built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the 1930s. It retains its original buildings in their historic setting with no apparent intrusions and only minor modifications. The buildings illustrate the use of standard architectural plans typical of the construction of ranger stations during the Depression. The nominated property encompasses the buildings that served the administrative side of the Remer District. They retain integrity

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling. The eastern portion of the original site is not included in the nomination. That wooded area holds two 1961 ranch-style houses used by Forest Service staff and lack sufficient integrity to be included in the National Register of Historic Places.

Narrative Description

There are three contributing buildings on the property. The station yard also includes minor landscape features and other elements that are not counted as separate resources. These include the driveway and the flagpoles. The flagpoles date from after the period of significance.

1. Office

The Ranger Station Office is a 1-1/2 story frame building, constructed in 1936 and based on USFS plan #68A. (See Figures 9-10) The plan is rectangular, measuring 26' x 30' with an asphalt shingled side-gabled roof. A stretcher-bond brick interior chimney, offset, straddles the center ridge line. The foundation is poured concrete with a full basement. The exterior is clapboard siding with metal end caps.

The north elevation has a centered front entry, enclosed with a gabled vestibule. (Photo 003) An architrave surrounds the single-entry wood door. There is a poured concrete porch platform with two straight steps with vertical sides. This central entry is flanked by two rectangular double-sash windows with 6-over-6 lights. The west elevation has an off-center single-entry door. (Photo 004) To the north of the door, there is one set of paired windows on the first floor, double-sash windows with 6-over-6 lights, with a single set of windows south of the door. On the upper floor, there is a paired double-sashed window with 4-over-4 lights. At ground level, there are two concrete window wells. On the south elevation, there are three windows. (Photo 005) The center window is smaller than the flanking windows. All are double sash with 6-over-6 lights. There are two concrete window wells. On the east elevation, there are two sets of paired windows on the first floor, double-sash windows with 6-over-6 lights. On the upper floor, there is a paired double-sashed window with 4-over-4 lights. There are two concrete window wells. (Photo 006)

The interior floor plan remains intact with the original wood doors and window framing. (See Figure 10 for the standard floor plan.) On the first floor, the rooms housed a reception area, (Photo 007) to the right of the entrance, with three offices and a restroom connected by a central hall (Photo 008). On the second floor, there are two rooms, primarily used for storage during the USFW era. There is a full basement. (Photo 009)

Changes to the exterior (date unknown) include the replacement of the building's wood roof shingles with asphalt, the addition of aluminum storm windows, and the installation of metal exterior storm doors on the front and back entrances.

2. Oil House

The oil storage house is a 10.5' x 18' one-story building with wood clapboard siding and a wood frame. (Photo 010, 011) The plan is rectangular, based on USFS Plan #23. The foundation is poured

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

concrete. The medium-pitched gabled roof, with exposed rafter ends, is sheathed with asphalt shingles. The primary entrance is on the north elevation, with a double-entry wood door, opening onto a concrete apron. A wood louvered vent is placed above the door in the gable end.

On the west side wall, there is one 4-light window located at the north and a metal louvered vent placed below the sash. A wood five-panel door is located at the south end of the west side wall. Two 4-light casement sashes are located on the south side wall, with a metal louvered vent placed below the more easterly sash, and a wood louvered vent above in the gable end. One 4-light casement sash is located on the east side wall, with a louvered vent located below the sash.

Inside the oil house, shelving lines the west and east side walls from the north to the south wall.

Alterations include the replacement of the original wood shingles with asphalt and the installation of steel mesh over all windows to protect the windows and secure the building. Based on the best evidence, these were added by the Corps of Engineers after the period of significance. The building remains in good condition.

3. Warehouse

The warehouse was constructed in 1935 using a standard plan (#14) from the Regional Office in Milwaukee. (Photo 012) Versions of this building are found at ranger stations throughout the Chippewa and Superior National Forest. Located south of the office, the warehouse is a one-and-one-half story, wood frame, rectangular building, 70' in length and 32' in width, covered by a medium pitch, side gable roof. A wide gable dormer is centered on the north roof slope. Two stretcher-bond brick chimneys are located on the south roof slope. The warehouse sits on a poured concrete foundation, exposed along the north facade, which supports a 6" concrete floor.

The north elevation has five double doors. The four stalls to the east are a crossbuck pattern, with fixed, 3-over-3 windows on the first and third set. These open into the space used for vehicle storage. The double doors on the west are vertical batten boards. They have a pair of 3-over-3 windows as well. These doors open into a shop used for mechanical repairs. There is a five-panel, single-entry wood door on the east end of this facade. A canopy projects from the roof on the north elevation and extends over the concrete apron and shelters the five entrance doors.

The east elevation has a pair of sliding windows with six lights in each sash. The upper level shows a single 4-over-4 window. The west elevation has a single-entry door and a pair of sliding windows. On the upper level, the window has been enclosed and has a metal ventilation hood. The south elevation (Photo 013) shows two paired sliding windows with six lights each. (Photo 010) These flank a single window in the center of the façade.

Inside the warehouse, on the ground floor, there are two rooms – a large space for vehicles and a workshop. The structural system is exposed and includes a series of 4" x 6" posts infilled with standard 2" x 4" framing. (Photo 014, 015) Truss beams with steel rods connected to the ridge are spaced throughout the second story. There is access to the second floor via a staircase. Several original benches and storage

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

cabinets are still in place as well as is an I-beam hoist in the shop. (Photo 016) A large trap door providing access to the second story is still in use.

In 1990 the original property was divided into three parcels, and the eastern half was sold to private owners. The Army Corps of Engineers retained the nominated parcel until 2006. Since that time, it has been used as a single dwelling. The second parcel, not included in this nomination, includes the northeast corner, 313 Main Street E, with a one-story single-family dwelling built in 1961, plus the garage built after 2006, and a shed erected in 1936. The third parcel, in the southeast corner, 12 Forestry Ave. SE, has a one-story single-family dwelling, built in 1961.

The Multiple Property Documentation Form, *Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1943*, gives the following eligibility advisory: "Constructed as part of a larger complex, such as a forestry station, may not be considered eligible unless a sufficient number of components survive from the original facility which can interpret the historic function of the property." The Remer District Ranger Station retains its key administrative components and is therefore eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Remer District Ranger Station
Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

CONSERVATION

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1936-1972

Significant Dates

1936

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

U.S. Forest Service (Architect)

Civilian Conservation Corps (Builder)

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Remer District Ranger Station, located in Chippewa National Forest, is historically significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of conservation. Built in 1936, the station illustrates the impact of the New Deal on the U.S. Forest Service. In a county that suffered some of the worst poverty in Minnesota during the Great Depression, the USFS helped to stabilize the economy through land acquisitions and the construction of needed infrastructure. Until its closure in 1972, the station served as an administrative center for land management of a district of 180,000 acres. This included construction and maintenance of infrastructure, leadership in reforestation programs, and supervision of recreational sites.

The period of significance is from its construction in 1936 until its closing in 1972. In addition, the station is eligible under Criterion A for its historic association with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) federal work relief program, as the CCC constructed the site's buildings, structures, and landscape. This property relates to the statewide historic contexts of "Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota, 1933-1943."

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the timber industry at its peak production, the lands of northern Minnesota became a battleground between competing interests. By tradition and treaty, the Ojibwe owned much of the land. In 1889 Congress passed the "Act for the relief and civilization of the Chippewa Indians in the State of Minnesota," commonly known as the Nelson Act after Minnesota Senator Knute Nelson. The legislation accomplished two policy goals. One was to open additional land for the timber companies. The title to reservation land, held in common by the Ojibwe, was transferred to individual Native heads of households. This opened the door for private sales to timber companies or other land dealers. The second policy goal was to foster the assimilation of Native peoples – the "civilization" part of the act.

The persistence of the Ojibwe in retaining a share of control of the forest land led to an armed confrontation known as the Battle of Sugar Point in 1898 that left seven U.S. soldiers dead and ten wounded. One point of contention was a "dead and burnt wood" clause that allowed the lumber companies to purchase timber at a significantly reduced rate if found in that condition. Exploiting the loophole, the companies would start fires and then quickly harvest both semi-burnt and green wood and claim it all as "dead", reaping massive profits at the expense of the Ojibwe. A subsequent Interior

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

Department report concluded that the Nelson Act “failed to secure to the Indians the largest benefit from the sale of the pine and agriculture lands.”¹

On a different track, conservationists organized to preserve the forest on behalf of “state pride, health, recreation, and the best interests of this generation and of posterity.” The coalition was anchored by the Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs. Gifford Pinchot, the chief of the Forestry Bureau of the Department of Agriculture, would write, “Here was the first application of Forestry to Government-owned forests in America. Without the farsighted and patriotic support of the Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs, it would have been impossible.”²

In response, in 1899, a proposal to make a national park out of the pine lands ignited a contest between conservationists, social reformers, lumbermen, settlers, and government officials. A compromise agreement in 1902, known as the Morris Act, rejected the plan for a national park and allowed for mixed use of the land as a scientifically managed federal forest reserve. The Act authorized Gifford Pinchot to select 200,000 acres of pine land and 25,000 acres of agricultural land from four Chippewa Indian Reservations to become a National Forest Reserve. This was the first Forest Reserve created by direct Congressional action rather than presidential proclamation. In 1908 the reserve officially became the Minnesota National Forest.³

Twenty years later, the name was changed to Chippewa National Forest. The relationship between the tribe and the U.S. government remained tense. Speaking to the Chippewa General Council in 1922, David Boyd said, “We, the Chippewa Indians, are the owners of the National Forest. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs owes us a great deal of money. Whatever property we have let him have, he has not settled for yet. He cannot do any more business with us until he settles the others first. We cannot put this on top of the other unsettled matters.” Tensions slackened with the coming of the New Deal. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act, enabled tribes to develop formal governments on reservations, leading to the formation of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. The IRA also restored surplus lands that had not been sold under the allotment system, increasing tribal land acreage within the National Forest.⁴

¹ Newell Searle, “Minnesota National Forest: The Politics of Compromise,” *Minnesota History* 42 (Fall 1971): 247. After the military came to the aid of lumber companies at the Battle of Sugar Point, a public debate about the Nelson Act led to an increasing focus on the management of Ojibwe timber. William E. Mattson, “The Battle of Sugar Point: A Re-examination,” *Minnesota History* 50 (Fall 1987): 269-275; “The Battle of Sugar Point,” *Leech Lake News*, October 5, 2020.

² Maria Sanford, *The Courant*, January 1900; Gifford Pinchot, *Breaking New Ground* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1947), 205.

³ Katherine Louise Smith, “A National Park for Minnesota,” *Outing* (N.p., 1902).; Andrews, C. C. Andrews, *The Minnesota National Park* (St. Paul, Minn: s.n., 1900).

⁴ David Boyd quoted in Elizabeth Steinson, “Ojibwe Absent Narratives in Minnesota Forest Park History,” (M.A. Thesis, St. Cloud State University, 2018), 66.

W. Roger Buffalohead, “The Indian New Deal: A Review Essay,” *Minnesota History* 48 (Winter 1983): 339–341; Anton Treuer, *Ojibwe in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010).

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

South Purchase Unit Expansion

Two influences changed the U.S. Forest Service in the 1930s, setting the stage for a significant expansion of the national forest.

The first was a shift in management philosophy. In 1933 the U.S. Forest Service released *A National Plan for American Forestry* – a massive 1,677-page document. It is often known as the Copeland Report after U.S. Senator Royal Copeland, who authored the Senate resolution that triggered the study. Its primary recommendations included an extension of public ownership of forest lands and more intensive management. Timber cutting, it contended, was far ahead of growth on private lands and the quality of the harvest was declining. The plan was never adopted as a whole, but it set the stage for new approaches to be introduced in the following decade, including the principles of sustained yields and expanded recreational opportunities.⁵

The second was the Great Depression. Great lumbering operations had stripped the region of trees. With much of the land already cutover, the local economy was already suffering, and the collapse extended to other sectors of the economy. A 1933 government study noted, “In the past, lumber companies have furnished an outlet for hay and vegetables, but with the decline in lumbering operations, this has largely disappeared.” The *Ely Miner* observed, “A large part of this cutover and burned-over area has no value for agricultural, for recreational, or anything except forest or flood control.”⁶

Writing about the area around Remer in 1938, sociologist Marion Gold Foster observed:

If you have driven through northern Minnesota’s cutover district, you have seen the stubby fields of brush or second growth coming up from the devastation of clear-cutting and fire. You have seen the forlorn, tar-papered shacks along the highway, housing a squatter from the drought-stricken Dakotas or a settler struggling to improve his lot and mostly living on hope. Here and there, perhaps, you have marked the painted, modest frame house of a forest farm family that is managing to make a go of it.⁷

The effect on Cass County was devastating. By 1935 more than one-third of its population was supported by emergency relief funds – the third-highest percentage of all counties in Minnesota. (See Figure 4.) Tax delinquencies on the land created a burden on local government. It created a backlog of property — reverted to the county or the state — that could not be sold and provided no tax income.⁸

The federal government stepped into the breach, and, after negotiations with the state and counties over a share of the income, moved to expand Chippewa National Forest. In August 1933, an Executive Order approved what became known as the North Purchase Unit, a 675,000-acre expansion to the north of

⁵ United States Forest Service, *A National Plan for American Forestry: A Report Prepared in Response to Senate Resolution* (Washington., D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1933).

⁶ George A. Pond and C. W. Crickman, “Planning Farm Organizations for the Northeast Cut-over Section of Minnesota,” *University of Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 295, (1933): 18-19.

⁷ Marion Gold Foster, “An Odyssey of the Minnesota Cutovers,” *American Forests*, 45 (1939): 352.

⁸ *Ely Miner*, January 29, September 9, 1932; *Walker Pilot*, February 8, 1935.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

the original forest. The U.S. Forest Service created three new districts — Marcell, Blackduck, and Dora Lake — each averaging around 180,000 acres.

In early 1935 the U.S. Forest Service began a substantial expansion of 356,000 acres to the south, including the direct purchase of 200,000 acres. Most of this South Purchase Unit land had been logged over and nearly eighty percent of the land was in tax delinquency. At the news, the *Walker Pilot* declared, “Nature, in its wisdom, first made a forest area of Cass county. Greed and avarice denuded it of most of its trees. This week, developments assure a return to Nature’s scheme.” Local officials echoed support for the expansion since the Forest Service would take over the maintenance of all township roads and many county roads and bridges.⁹

These new additions brought the total National Forest area to over 1.2 million acres, although only roughly half was federal land within the remaining acreage consisting of lands that were state or privately owned.¹⁰ The Forest Service established the Walker and Remer Ranger Districts on the South Purchase to manage the work. (Figure 3) H. Basil Wales described the newly designated property, writing:

The land within the purchase units had been largely cut over and repeatedly burned, although isolated areas protected by lakes and swamps had escaped fire. The original forest area appeared as an oasis of pine in a sea of forest devastation. Also, in the purchase units, many isolated settlers were struggling for a livelihood on land poorly adapted to agriculture. On areas of better soil were sparsely settled farm communities. Destruction of the forest had deprived the settlers of an opportunity of earning a supplemental income in the woods.¹¹

The Forest Service initiated a resettlement program in the Remer District. James Walley, the supervisor for Chippewa National Forest, worked with the newly hired district ranger to purchase land. Local property owners were encouraged to submit proposals indicating a willingness to sell or trade for land closer to town. Responding to rumors of possible evictions, Walley assured farmers that purchases “would not include land now in use for farming, except in cases where the settlers are isolated and could better themselves by moving to another section.”¹²

The district ranger conducted a land survey, classified parcels for best use, and then met with town representatives and landowners.

Sitting down with each township board and town assessor in the district, they jotted down recommendations of the town officials as to what was agricultural land, which pieces in the township were recreational, and which ones (were) forest land — the three primary classifications. Most of this classifying work took place around kitchen stoves. The local ranger would call a meeting, and more often than not the meeting would be held in the

⁹ *Walker Pilot*, March 8, 1935.

¹⁰ *Grand Rapids Herald-Review*, February 20, 1935; *Walker Pilot*, March 1, 1935.

¹¹ H. Basil Wales, “Evolution of Management in the Chippewa,” In *The Yearbook of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office; 1949): 314-316.

¹² *Walker Pilot*, March 1, 1935; Robert Gough, *Farming the Cutover: A Social History of Northern Wisconsin, 1900-1940* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 181-182.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

kitchen of the chairman of the town board, where around the coffee pot, they would argue whether a piece of land was good or bad.¹³

In the end, around thirty-six families chose to sell and move closer to town.

Among the first steps for the Remer District Ranger was to find work for unemployed local workers, with the Forest Service supervising a salvage cut of the cutover forest. Salvage logging is the practice of logging trees in forest areas that have been damaged.¹⁴

Civilian Conservation Corps

The rapid transformation of Chippewa National Forest was completed under a new federal program — the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Only days after Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration in March 1933, the new president established the CCC under an executive order. Its purpose, he said, was to "relieve stress, to build men, to accomplish constructive results in our vast Federal, State, and private forest properties." Over the next decade, Corps built trails, roads, bridges, campsites, and other infrastructure that improved the recreational opportunities in the forest and helped conserve its natural resources. They also planted trees, fought forest fires, and conducted other conservation activities.¹⁵

Multiple federal agencies guided CCC operations. The War Department managed camp construction, administration, and supplies. At the same time, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of the Interior were responsible for planning and supervising work projects in national forests. Working closely with state relief agencies, the Labor Department selected the workforce, employing single men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, primarily from families on the relief rolls. The CCC Camps also hired Local Experienced Men (LEMs), typically men who lived near the camp and had forestry experience. A typical CCC camp housed about 200 enrollees, up to twenty-five army personnel, around thirty staff from the Forest Service, and ten to twenty LEMs.¹⁶

The impact was immediate, as forest supervisor James M. Walley told the *Grand Rapids Herald-Review*:

From the forest communities in and about the Chippewa, the regular CCC organization of about 3,000 men is augmented by some 230 local men who are enrolled as local woodsmen. In addition to these local woodsmen, nearly fifty local men out of 150 foremen and camp

¹³ Marion Gold Foster, "An Odyssey of the Minnesota Cutovers," *American Forests*, 45 (1939): 353.

¹⁴ Ibid., 353; *Cass Lake Times*, June 13, 1935.

¹⁵ Joseph M. Speakman, "Into the Woods: The First Year of the Civilian Conservation Corps," *Prologue Magazine* 38 (Fall 2006); John Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967).

¹⁶ Robert S. Drake, "The Civilian Conservation Corps: A Brief History," in *It Was a Good Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Northeastern Minnesota*, ed. Edward P. Nelson and Barbara Sommer (Duluth: St. Louis County Historical Society, 1987), 12; Alison T. Otis, with William D. Honey, Thomas C. Hogg, and Kimberly K. Lakin, *The Forest Service and The Civilian Conservation Corps: 1933-42* (Washington D.C.: USDA Forest Service, 1986), 6.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

superintendents are employed on the Chippewa. This is a far cry from the dozen or fifteen men who found employment in the old days in the forest. In the old days, before the CCC force was created by President Roosevelt, three rangers and a few lookout men formed the administrative organization. A few other men were given seasonal work at the nursery or in the maintenance of roads. Although logging and some planting took place, the far-reaching projects of today were merely ideals and mostly subjects for textbook writers. The CCCs have given us the opportunity to put into practical application the principles of forestry on a large scale and realize the ambitions of every forester.¹⁷

There would be twenty-three CCC camps in Chippewa National Forest, although the camps did not operate simultaneously, and in some cases, companies occupied more than one camp. One additional camp, SP-16, was managed by the National Park Service. The Civilian Conservation Corps built new ranger stations at Blackduck, Remer, and Walker, while additional buildings were added at Cass Lake, Bena, and Cut Foot Sioux.

Typically, the district ranger was closely involved with scheduling the CCC crews. Two primary tasks occupied their work. H. Basil Wales, assistant forester for the North Central Region based in Milwaukee, described the responsibilities of the CCC, writing, "From the standpoint of forest management, one had to start from scratch to restore and build up forest productivity. The CCC program helped greatly. At first, the job was one of establishing protection facilities—lookout towers, communication lines, and roads—for more rapid transportation for fire-fighting crews." New roads greatly impacted the region, improving response times to fight fires and opening the door for better access to recreational opportunities. Forest Service Superintendent Walley also quickly expanded the system of fire towers so that, he stated, "we can practically look down into the backyards of every farm and village in the National Forest and Purchase Unit." The CCC unit stationed in Remer also conducted controlled burns of meadows every spring.¹⁸

The work then turned to "the wholesome work of forest regeneration." The newly acquired land was in poor condition, especially in the cutover areas of the Southern Purchase Unit. In addition to timber stand improvements, CCC crews helped to build the Lydick Nursery at Cass Lake in 1934. The Forest Service boasted that the nursery provided 7,500,000 small trees a year, providing seedlings for reforestation. At the end of 1940, 40,000 acres of barren lands had been planted with jack, red, white pines, and white spruce.¹⁹

Other typical work projects included telephone line construction, road and trail construction, lake surveys, and rodent control. By the time the CCC closed operations in 1942, it had made a lasting impact on Chippewa National Forest. Historian Barbara Sommer described its legacy in Minnesota:

¹⁷ *Grand Rapids Herald-Review*, October 31, 1934.

¹⁸ H. Basil Wales, "Evolution of Management in the Chippewa," 314-316; *Ely Miner*, September 9, 1935. Marion Gold Foster, "An Odyssey of the Minnesota Cutovers," *American Forests*, 45 (1939): 353; *Cass Lake Times*, June 13, 1935; *Remer Camp News*, April 1937.

¹⁹ *Askov American*, July 26, 1934; Wales, "Evolution of Management," 315; *Ely Miner*, July 6, 1934.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

The hard-working men and boys of the CCC gave state forests a healthier infrastructure – in the shape of roads, buildings, fire towers, tree nurseries, and disease control programs – than existed before 1933. Forest Service leaders still say the work of the CCC moved forest conservation and development in Minnesota twenty years ahead of where it would otherwise have been.²⁰

Remer

Once the boundaries for the South Purchase were determined, Remer was a logical location for a new district ranger station. Organized as a town in 1904, it was platted in 1910 by the Tri-State Land Company, a firm that established several townsites on the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Sault Ste. Marie Railway. With a new station and a fine hotel, the town leaders believed it was “destined to become one of the main towns on the Soo line between Duluth and Bemidji.” These hopes were built around the logging industry, with several nearby camps and three mills.²¹

The envisioned growth never took place. In the 1930s, the town’s population was 270 people, with other families settled in the surrounding township. However, the New Deal was already having an impact. By 1934, even before the South Purchase Unit was approved, Remer was targeted as an important hub, with the opening of State Highway 34 west of town and the approval of a new highway southeast to Hill City.²²

Following the selection of the town and site, the USFS proceeded with the construction of the station. In 1932, at a time of reevaluation of its mission, the Forest Service issued the *Lands Handbook L (R6)* with guidelines for constructing ranger stations. A chapter, entitled “What Makes Up a Ranger Station (A Guide Not a Rule),” considered the public image of the national forests:

The ranger station is regarded by the public as the official entrance to the National Forest. Therefore, this entrance deserves the most careful planning in order that it may be pleasing to the eye as well as to evidence, order, and efficiency.²³

Declaring “Utility first, beauty second,” the guidelines stated, “Logically the district headquarters should be located so that the administrative unit can be handled with a minimum of effort and a maximum of efficiency.” The *Handbook* covered a variety of topics including site selection, site layout, and location of specific structures. It emphasized that unimproved sites should have a good water supply, drainage, and

²⁰ Barbara W. Sommer, *Hard Work and a Good Deal* (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2008), 97.

²¹ *Duluth New Tribune*, February 14, October 9, 1911.

²² *Remer Record*, January 19, 1934. The *Record* was sold to out-of-town interests in 1934 and Remer remained without a local newspaper for more than a decade. *Remer, Minnesota*, compiled by Cecilia M. McKeig (Remer, Minn.: Remer Civic Club, 1997), 81-82.

²³ United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, *Lands Handbook, L (R6)*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932)175.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

protection from the elements. The guide recommended establishing sites with a southern exposure and proximity to nearby towns and highways.²⁴

Before the transformation of the Forest Service in the 1930s, the regional office handled the design and construction of service buildings. The New Deal era ushered in more central planning after W. Ellis Groben was named Chief Architect of the Forest Service. Groben graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and then worked primarily as a residential architect. He advocated using a “Forest Service” identity and introduced various plans, later published in the 1938 book, *Acceptable Building Plans: Forest Service Administrative Buildings*. This book, Groben wrote, would make “immediately available a group of typical plans, based on those principles of correct planning in which such fundamentals as ample daylight, cross-ventilation, direct circulation, etc., are paramount and in which the following faults of bad planning do not occur.” The publication provided descriptions of regional styles, site locations, orientation, and building materials, with a series of building plans.²⁵

The Remer District Office was based on a standard plan – Plan 68A – developed through the Milwaukee-based regional headquarters. (Figures 9) Two years later, the plan used in Remer appeared in *Acceptable Building Plans*, designated there as D-9. (Figure 10) It was one of the most common USFS office designs – used at the Blackduck and Walker stations in Chippewa National Forest and at five stations in nearby Superior National Forest. The design for the warehouse is also based on a standard plan from the regional office. Variations of this plan were found at all eight ranger stations in Chippewa National Forest and at six sites in Superior National Forest. A series of drawings, including plans, elevations, and sections, describe a “warehouse with or without shop” and are identified as Plan #14.²⁶

CCC Company #1762 built the complex. Organized in May 1933, that unit was assigned to Chippewa National Forest in November of that year. Based at the Squaw Lake Civilian Conservation Corps, Camp F-36, the unit was staffed primarily with men from Kansas. The company transferred to the new Remer CCC Camp (F-46) in January 1936, and one of their first tasks was the construction of this station. The spring 1936 camp newsletter reported, “The new Remer Ranger station is rapidly being completed under Mr. Olson. All the flooring is in, and most of the woodwork is finished.” The office and warehouse were ready for occupancy in September 1936. The crew boasted, “When completed, the

²⁴ Ibid., 180.

²⁵ United States Department of Agriculture. Forest Service, *Acceptable Plans, Forest Service Administrative Buildings* (Washington., D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), A-10; John Grosvenor, *A History of the Architecture of the USDA Forest Service* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 1999); Kay Atwood with Sally Donovan, Dennis Gray, and Ward Tonsfeldt, *Utility and Service Combined with Beauty: A Contextual and Architectural History of USDA Forest Service Region 6 (1905-1960)*, (Pacific Northwest Region: USDA Forest Service, 2004).

²⁶ “Status of Ranger Station Improvements,” dated April 25, 1938, *Chippewa National Forest*. The drawing is dated January 26, 1935, with some revisions completed on February 3, 1937. The plans were drawn by NHO and approved by HC. A drawing dated November 8, 1935, provides the plans for a reinforced concrete basement for Plan #14.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

Ranger Station will be a fine addition to the community and will be another monument to show that the CCC is a paying proposition.”²⁷

The Forest Service prepared a landscape design for the site in 1936, although the plans indicate revisions in 1945. (Figure 5) A variety of trees were specified, such as white spruce, burr and red oak, basswood, black cherry, birch, and American elm. Foundation plantings for the office included snowberry, roses, and forsythia. Sumac was among the items to be planted along the driveway. It is not clear whether the plan was ever fully executed.

The Work of the District Ranger Station

The work was not done with the end of the Depression and the close of the CCC. The cutover lands, nurtured by an annual planting program, returned to forest. Over the thirty-six years that the Remer District operated, the ranger was responsible for land and timber surveys, land acquisitions, fire protection, pest control, erosion work, fish restocking, wildlife activities, and the maintenance of Forest Service truck trails and roads. Milo Stefan, who worked at the Remer Station as an assistant ranger from 1959 to 1961, recalled that there were typically three full-time employees – the ranger, the assistant ranger, and a clerk. During the warmer months, two “tower men” staffed the lookouts.²⁸

The most common tasks involved timber sales. The district office would survey the forest and select parcels to be made available, then carefully mark the boundaries. Logging companies would then submit a bid. These sales were primarily with small logging companies with fewer than a dozen employees. “Some guys had horses yet,” Milo Stefan remembered. Larry Jewett, who logged with his brother, said that aspen was the most common wood, harvested and then taken to the Remer peeler mill owned by Walt Andrews. From there, it might be shipped to Grand Rapids or Duluth.²⁹ The Remer Timber Company, which ran the peeler mill, opened in the early 1950s, had a crew of seventeen men at the plant, but with purchases from loggers, supported as many as 350 people with jobs. A 1971 USFS study noted that the district office was a thriving center for local loggers at the time of its closure:

There are about fifty timber purchasers in Remer and vicinity that log on National Forest lands on a full or part-time basis. These individuals have become accustomed to dropping into

²⁷ *Remer Camp News*, April, August 1936. The construction foreman, Erhart Olson, from Bagley, Minnesota, was hired as an LEM for the unit. Keith W. Matson, “The Civilian Conservation Corps on the Chippewa National Forest,” 1985. All these camp buildings have been either moved or demolished, except those at Camp Rabideau, listed as a National Historic Landmark in 2006; Inventory Form, Corps of Engineers, November 1985, Chippewa National Forest. The Remer camp remained in operation until its closing in April 1942. A year later, it reopened as the first German prisoner of war camp in Chippewa National Forest.

²⁸ Milo Stefan, interview by Daniel J. Hoisington, June 27, 2022. A “Ranger District Job Load,” dated May 20, 1935, described the wide variety of conservation projects that occurred in the eight ranger districts throughout the Chippewa National Forest.

²⁹ Larry Jewett, interview with Daniel J. Hoisington, June 27, 2022.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

the office for truck tickets, miscellaneous scaling services, inquiries about sales or potential sales, questions concerning sale administration problems, payments, etc.³⁰

Fire prevention is a task often associated with the Forest Service, embodied in the popular image of Smoky the Bear. The Remer office was no exception. When the fire danger was high, lookouts staffed two towers, maintaining regular radio contact with the district office. A standby crew was ready to respond, and the district ranger and his assistant often joined in halting forest fires. The watchful care proved generally successful, and large fires were rare and limited to ten to fifteen acres at a maximum.

The ranger's work included conservation and restoration – a central goal of the USFS from the 1930s. Driving through the area today, it is hard to picture the extent of the cutover acres. This was not a quick fix, as the Forest Service advised in 1938, if residents “can hold out for ten or fifteen more years, until the second growth timber is ready for cutting, there should be more employment than men.”³¹ H. Basil Wales wrote:

As land was purchased, the process of restoring the forest became a more important part of the program. By the time that title was established, suitable planting stock was available at the new nursery. Release, thinning, and pruning operations were also undertaken in the limited areas of purchased land, where sapling stands had survived fire.

At the same time, other resource values were enhanced. The camp work plans included projects for the protection and the administration of the forest, recreational development, and better food and habitat for wildlife. Land use plans were prepared to strengthen the agricultural communities through the transfer of settlers from poor and isolated tracts.³²

Recreation was now a central part of the USFS mission with the added work of supervision of campgrounds and picnic areas and the maintenance of boat access areas.

Army Corps of Engineers

Chippewa National Forest consolidated its districts in 1972, combining Remer with the Walker and Deer River Districts. Recognizing its place in the local economy, a USFS staff recommendation stated, “Of the four units proposed for closing, Remer would perhaps be the most difficult to vacate. Closure of the Remer unit will require our maximum attention to ensure fullest understanding and acceptance.” The concern was its impact on the Remer Timber Company, which purchased from logging operators in the National Forest. “The inconvenience to timber purchasers and this company appear as a threat to that business,” the report concluded. It was proposed to turn the property into multiple residential lots.³³

³⁰ “Chippewa National Forest Ranger District Consolidation Proposal,” (United States: n.p., 1971), 19.

³¹ Marion Gold Foster, “An Odyssey of the Minnesota Cutovers,” 366.

³² H. Basil Wales, “Evolution of Management on Chippewa,” in *Yearbook of Agriculture*, 1949, 315.

³³ “Chippewa National Forest Ranger District Consolidation Proposal,” (United States: s.n., 1971), 3, 10; Edward Sunde, interview by Peggy Korsmo, transcription, Mississippi Headwaters Reservoirs Oral History Interviews, December 17, 1986: 3.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

Instead, the Remer Ranger District property was transferred to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) and served as the Mississippi Headwaters Office. Its primary responsibility was supervising and maintaining several dams in the region. The work also included the management of facilities for camping, boat launching, swimming, and other recreational activities. Edmund Fitzpatrick, a long-time COE manager, recalled,

They had a dam tender at each site — one at Gull, one at Cross Lake, one at Federal Dam, Leech Lake, one at Pokegama, one at Sandy (Lake). My work was to more or less coordinate all the work between all the (sites), and we had a warehouse where we would stock a lot of supplies. . . . We discovered that the U.S. Forest Service had six acres of land in Remer, Minnesota, with a lot of nice buildings on it. And they were going to abandon it, and we got in touch with them. On paper, I think the Corps of Engineers might have paid a dollar.³⁴

In December 2006, following the consolidation of the COE Mississippi Headwaters Office in St. Paul, the federal government sold the remaining property.

Conclusion

The Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) “Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota” outlines the types of properties potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under the MPDF, along with registration requirements. The complex was constructed in 1936 by the Civilian Conservation Corps and funded by the federal government. To be considered significant under Criterion A, the property must have been “an important project through size/scope of work, or the number of people involved.” The Remer District Ranger Station played a significant role in the expansion of Chippewa National Forest during the New Deal. Addressing the collapse of the local economy during the Great Depression, the federal government acquired thousands of acres of cutover land and established Civilian Conservation Corps camps to construct its infrastructure of roads, towers, and district offices. Working closely with district rangers, CCC workers also carried out a program of reforestation.

Over its years of operation, the Remer District Ranger Station served as an administrative center to carry out the USFS programs of timber sales, fire prevention, recreation, and conservation. On the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of Chippewa National Forest, the editor of *The Walker Pilot* wrote, “Few people in Cass County realize the extent to which the Chippewa National Forest is concerned with their lives.” This district station played a vital role in completing its mission.³⁵

³⁴ Edmund Fitzpatrick, interview by Jo Blatti, transcription, Mississippi Headwaters Reservoirs Oral History Interviews, December 17, 1986: 6, 26. Fitzgerald recalled that at the time of the transfer, “They had three nice dwellings on this site.”

³⁵ *Walker Pilot*, August 7, 1968.

Remer District Ranger Station
Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

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Newspapers

Cass Lake Times

Duluth New Tribune

Ely Miner

Grand Rapids Herald-Review

Remer Record

Walker Pilot

Remer District Ranger Station
Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota
County and State

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): CA-REC-012

Remer District Ranger Station
Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.2 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84:

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☒ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 15 | Easting: 430726 | Northing: 5211761 |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property includes all of Cass County property 95-001-4203. See Figure 2 for boundaries.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes buildings and structures that have been historically associated with the administrative function of Remer District Ranger Station and maintain historic integrity.

The east portion of the original property, the site of the superintendent's residence, was not included within the boundary due to a loss of integrity to its buildings. (See Figure 2) In 1961, two houses were built, both one-story, ranch-style homes (313 Main Street E., Cass County PIN 95-001-4208 and 12

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

Forestry Ave. SE, 95-001-4209). Although still standing, these two houses have diminished integrity due to changes to windows, siding, and other alterations, such as the conversion of the under-roof garage into an enclosed room with a large window. One original building, the 1936 superintendent's garage, remains on the 313 Main Street E. property. It has been moved from its original location and has been altered with a storage addition on the west side and a replacement lift door.

Following the sale and division of these two eastern parcels by the federal government in 1990, the 1936 residence was moved off to a site approximately a quarter mile southeast on Forestry Avenue. This was not part of the original USFW property. It has been altered with new windows, new siding, a new chimney, and a large, attached garage. (Cass County PIN 95-356-0260).

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Daniel J. Hoisington
organization: Hoisington Preservation Consultants
street & number: P. O. Box 13585
city or town: Roseville state: MN zip code: 55113
e-mail djh@hoisingtonpreservation.com
telephone: 651-415-1034
date: June 22, 2023

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County Minnesota

County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: Remer

City or Vicinity: Remer

County: Cass

State: Minnesota

Photographer: Daniel J. Hoisington

Date Photographed: December 1, 2021; June 27, 2022

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 001: North elevation of USFS Remer Station Office, view to SE
- 002: Driveway, view to N
- 003: North elevation (on left) of USFS Remer Station Office, view to SE
- 004: West elevation of USFS Remer Station Office, view to E
- 005: South elevation of USFS Remer Station Office, view to NW
- 006 East elevation (on left) of USFS Remer Station Office, view to SW
- 007 Interior of office, first floor, view to W, clerk-reception area
- 008 Interior of office, first floor, view to S, hall
- 009 Interior of office, first floor, view to E, steps to basement
- 010 North and west elevations of USFS Remer Station Oil House, view to SE
- 011 South and east elevations of USFS Remer Station Oil House, view to NW
- 012 North elevation of USFS Remer Station Warehouse, view to SE
- 013 South elevation of USFS Remer Station Warehouse, view to NW
- 014 Interior of warehouse, first floor, view to SE
- 015 Interior of warehouse, first floor, view to NE
- 016 Interior of warehouse, second floor, hoist, view to W

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 1

Figure 1: Remer District Ranger Station, Remer, Minnesota. *Source: Google Earth*



UTM: 15 430726 5211761

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 2

Figure 2: Remer District Ranger Station Site. The original property, as acquired in 1935, included Parcels 95-001-4203, -4208, and -4209. *Source: Cass County*



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

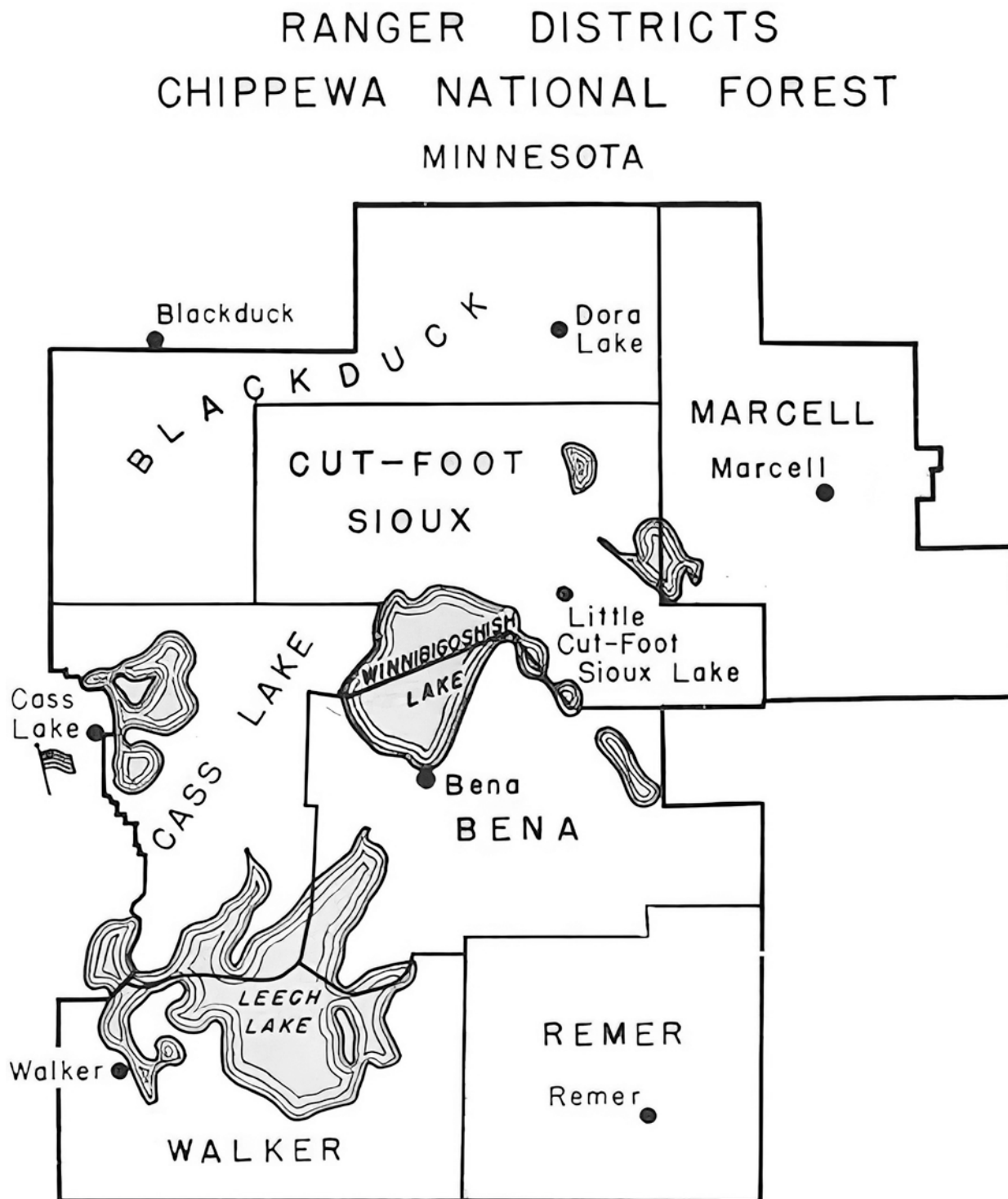
County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 3

Figure 3: Ranger Districts, 1935-1972, Chippewa National Forest.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

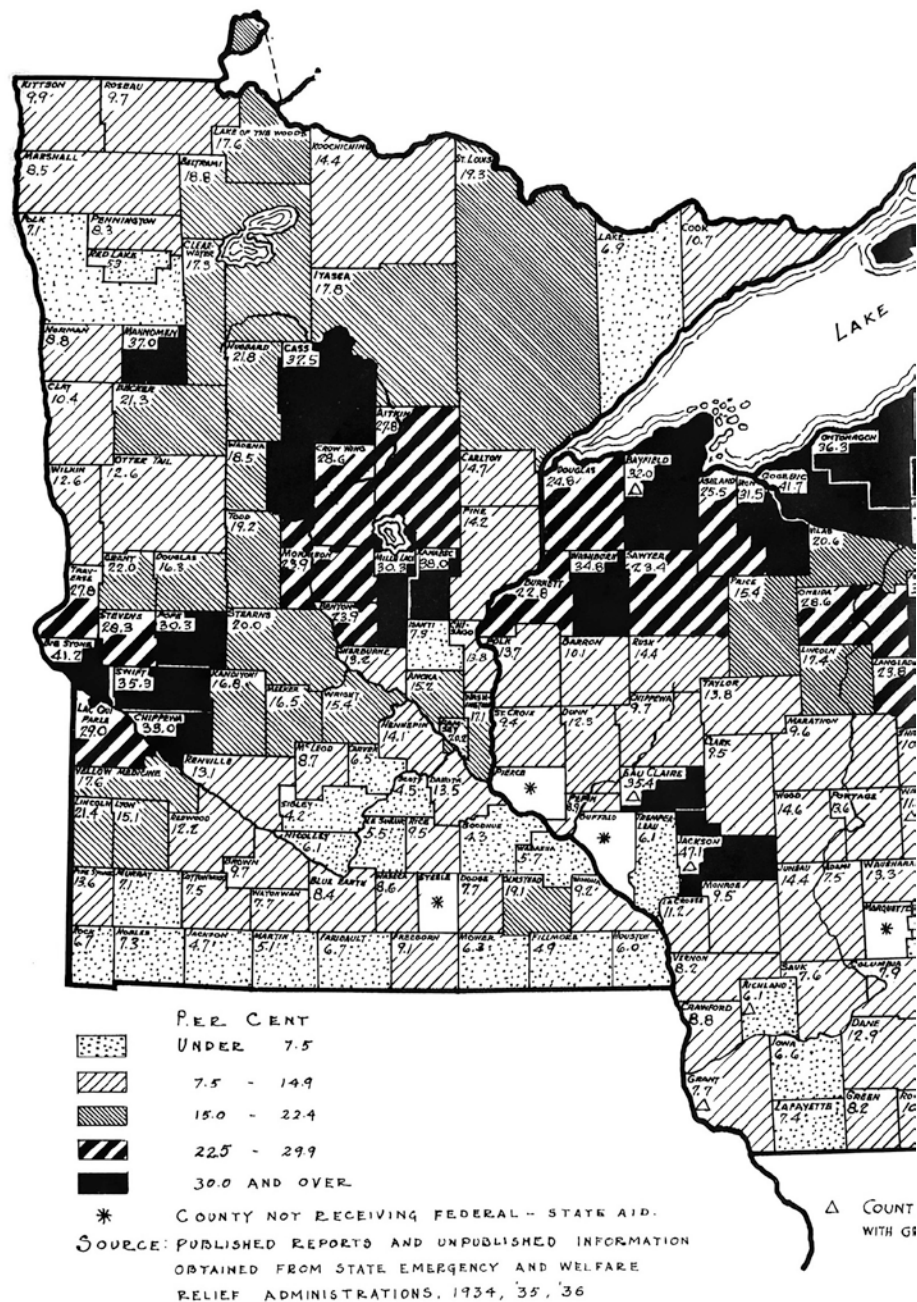
County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 4

Figure 4: Percent of Population Receiving Relief from Federal or State Funds on an Average Monthly Basis, 1934-36



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

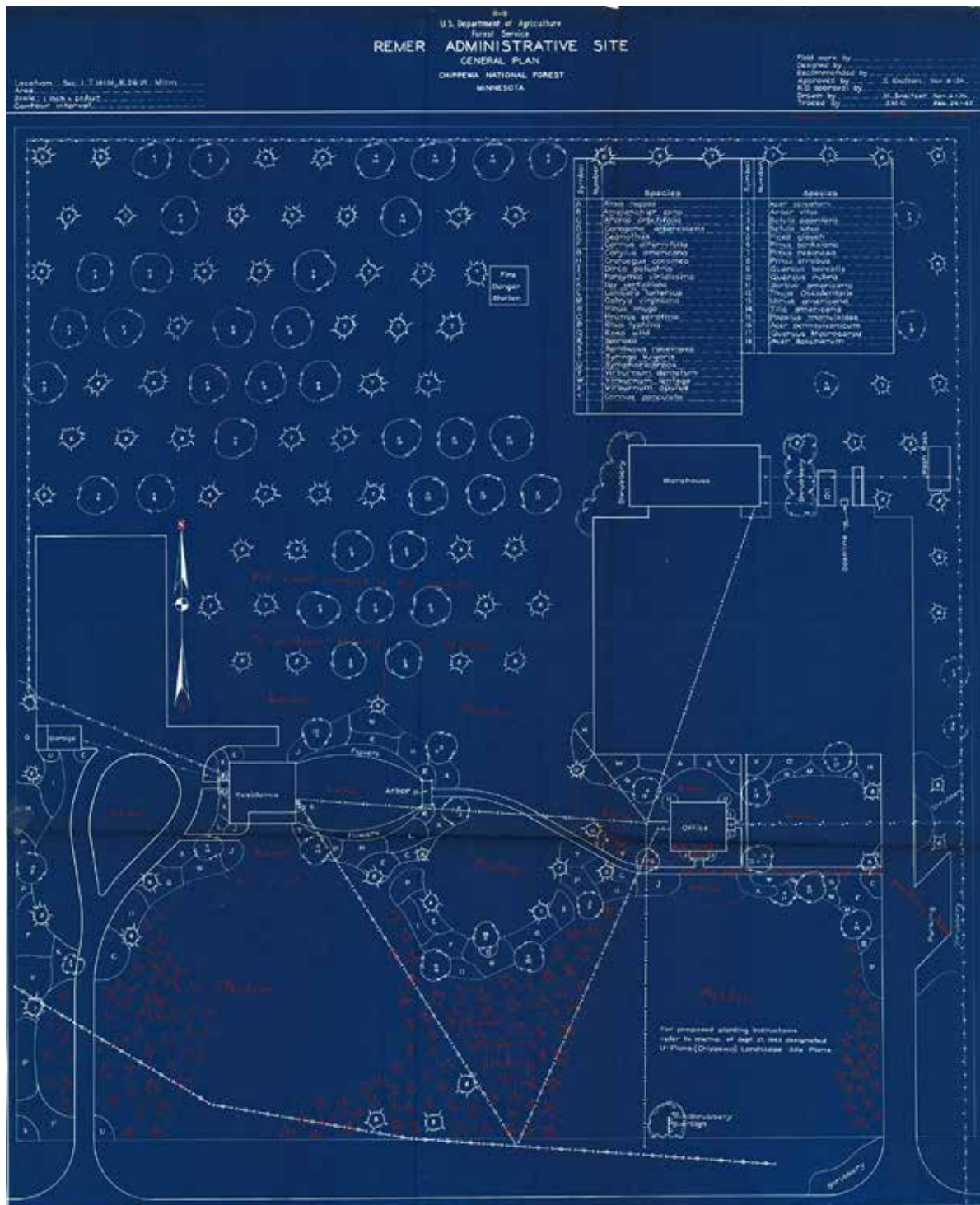
County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 5

Figure 5: Remer Ranger District Station, Site Plan, 1945. Source: *Chippewa National Forest*



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

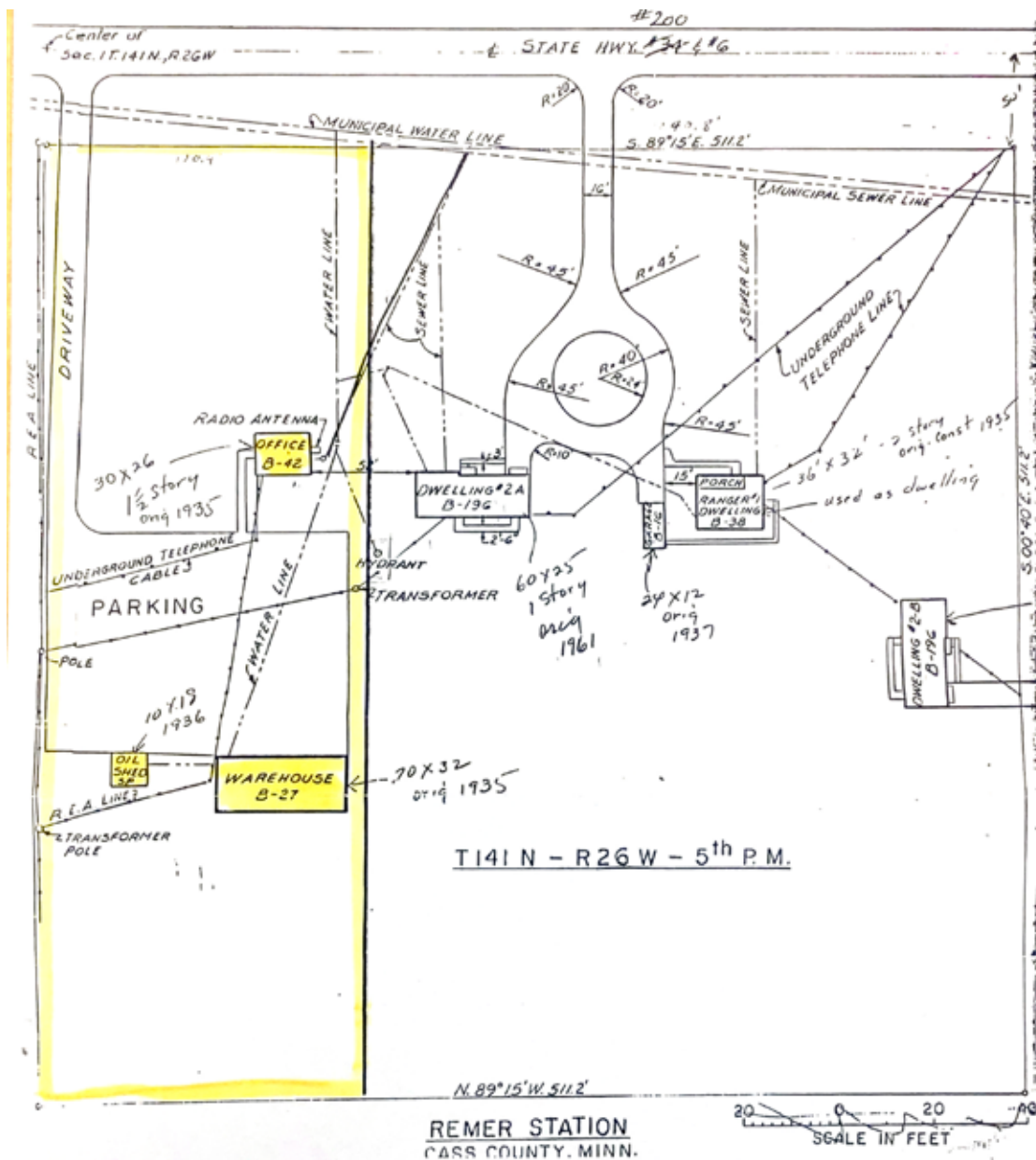
County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 6

Figure 6: Remer District Ranger Station, 1985. In 1961 the residential portion of the property was changed with the construction of two new single-family residences and the change of location of the garage (B-16). The original ranger #1 dwelling was later moved off the property. *Source: Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office*



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Figures Page 7

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Figure 7: Remer District Ranger Station, 1952. Source: *Minnesota Historical Society*



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 8

Figure 8: Remer District Ranger Station, Office and Warehouse, 1961. *Source: Private Collection*



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

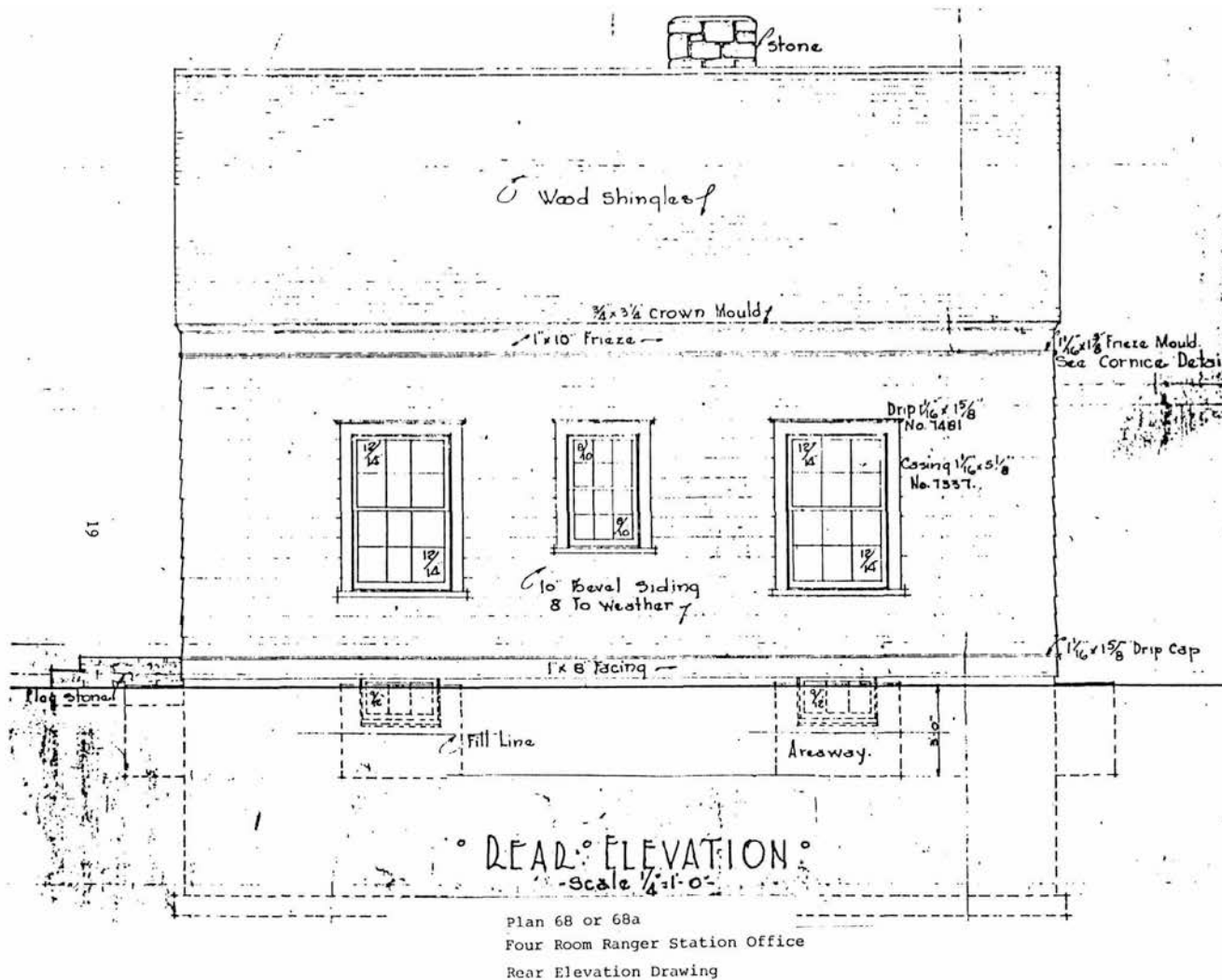
County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 9

Figure 9: USFS Plan #68A. Rear Elevation. Source: Hiawatha National Forest



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 10

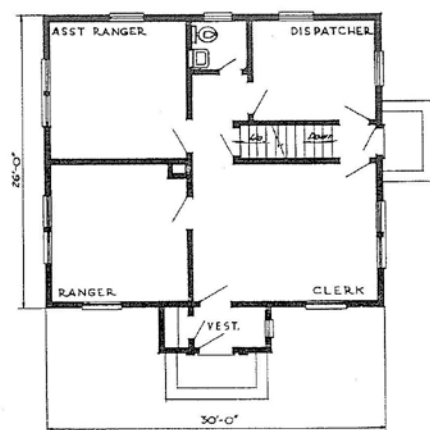
Figure 10: Building Plan D-9. *Source: Acceptable Plans*



SIDE ELEVATION



FRONT ELEVATION



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

RANGER STATION OFFICE
REGION 9

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Remer District Ranger Station

Name of Property

Cass County, Minnesota

County and State

Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota
(1933-1943)

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 11

PHOTO KEY

