

CHAPTER 3:

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

OVERVIEW OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Chik Wauk Lodge property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007 for its local significance as a representative of “a unique historical pattern of fishing-resort outdoor recreation that flourished in the Border Lakes Country of northeastern Minnesota, in and around the lakes and streams of the Superior National Forest, from the 1920s to the early 1960s.”¹ The nomination indicates that the 1933 Lodge meets National Register Criterion A for its local significance in the area of Entertainment / Recreation.

“The rough-cut stone lodge building was once the centerpiece of a large Gunflint Trail resort complex, which offered to tourists: lodging in rustic-style cabins, cooked meals as well as access to above-average fishing and northern Minnesota scenery. The lodge served as a store, resort office, restaurant, and lounge area for resort guests. Since the lodge has not been significantly altered or moved from its original site and the surrounding landscape and socioeconomic patterns of the upper Gunflint Trail have changed little, the building retains all seven aspects of integrity to a substantial degree.”²

The nomination goes on to indicate that the lodge is an

“artifact of a historic pattern of recreational tourism in northeast Minnesota that saw fluorescence in the early and middle decades of the 20th Century. This pattern was centered around family owned and operated resort facilities that catered to automobile tourist that sought out rustic accommodations, guided fishing and scenic character of the Gunflint Trail landscape.”³

The relationship between Chik-Wauk Resort and the Gunflint Trail is described in the nomination. A broader contextual basis for the significance of Chik-Wauk is provided by the multiple-property National Register Nomination for Tourism and Recreational Development in Voyageurs National Park.⁴ An excerpt from that nomination is pertinent to the Chik-Wauk property:

“In Minnesota, as elsewhere across the Great Lakes states, urban tourists followed national trends with annual trips to the scenic lakes of the North Woods. Before the 1920s, mostly wealthy sportsmen and families of the leisure class traveled to hunting and fishing clubhouses, luxury resorts, or summer homes on the northern lakes. A significant recreational fishing industry developed on Minnesota lakes where small-scale entrepreneurs established fishing resorts with clubhouses and rental cabins to support the urban tourists. Many outdoorsmen, including Native Americans of the region, offered guide services to sportsmen. During the 1920s and subsequent decades, tourists of the upper middle class and middle class

invaded the North Woods in automobiles. Like many of their wealthier counterparts they often aspired to owning a scenic lakefront summer home. More cabins began to dot the lakes across Northern Minnesota.”⁵

The Voyageurs nomination identifies *Resorts* as a property type that is significant:

“Resort development in Minnesota began in the central lake district in the 1920s. Initially, resorts arose within remote scenic locations and railroads carried the privileged elite to various recreational destinations. As time progressed, resorts diversified and catered to the growing number of middle-class travelers. Smaller, mom-and-pop resorts offered recreational opportunities for the new tourist class. The resorts served the growing number of tourists who traveled to experience the natural environment. They offered an escape from the cities, but not a complete separation from contemporary technologies and amenities. Resorts represent the diversifying tourist industry and its transformation to accommodate the growing number of individuals and their families who stayed for shorter lengths of time and had fewer connections to the surrounding community.”⁶

Resorts provided tourists with the same remoteness and relaxation of lakeside summer cottages, without the investment in ownership and maintenance required for cottages. These visitors could not afford, or chose not to buy property. Instead, they travelled to resorts similar to Chik-Wauk to experience the natural setting of northern Minnesota. By the 1920s, the typical resort included a central lodge and several cabins as well as numerous outbuildings and landscape features. Resorts offered choices that ranged from the American Plan (in which meals were provided in the main lodge), housekeeping cottages (equipped with beds and kitchen supplies), and bunk houses for canoe trippers. The Voyageurs nomination explains some of the typical aspects of resort lodges and their associated landscapes:

“Constructed to serve as gathering, recreation, and dining areas for guests, they range from large, rustic structures reminiscent of the Adirondack lodges found in the east to more humble structures. Many include large native stone fireplaces and some contain rustic details such as bark-covered interior walls. The associated cabins are small, generally 300 to 600 square feet, and constructed of a variety of materials. The cabins and lodges are generally sited along lake edges to optimize views and access to the water. Other features associated with this properties include docks, roads (in some cases), and numerous small utilitarian outbuildings. The outbuildings tend to be either located behind the cabins or close to the road and include privies, ice houses, boat houses, workshops, storage sheds, tool sheds, fish cleaning houses, laundries, stores, generator buildings, pump houses, water tanks, cisterns, saunas, root cellars, and employee quarters. Other landscape features include breakwaters, ramps for lake access, paths, driveways, flag poles, beaches, fire circles, and informal play areas.”⁷

NATIONAL REGISTER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chik-Wauk National Register Nomination is focused on the lodge building, which is the only contributing resource counted. The nomination also counts one non-contributing building, however it is not clear what building is addressed. Research conducted for the cultural landscape report indicates that the generator building and former Forest Service Cabin (indicated as “relocated Cabin on Figure C) both contribute to the significance of the property. In addition, the landscape associated with the former resort also contributes to an extent that is not reflected in the nomination.

A description of the setting associated with the lodge building is included, noting:

“The resort complex was built on approximately 7,250 feet of ledge rock dominated shoreline that encompasses a small bay and point of land on the east side of a narrows on the southeast corner of Saganaga Lake. The cabins and docks, as well as the lodge itself, were strategically situated on the landscape to afford resort visitors optimum access to the lake as well as the abundant north-woods scenery. The lodge is situated on an upland landform composed of outcrops of local tonalite. This location provides a commanding view of the bay and the surrounding north-woods landscape.”

The National Register boundary encompasses the main lodge as well as a portion of the peninsula and surrounding harbor area (see Figure C). Although the boundary was chosen to include “most of the original use area of the resort and the bay that was once the focus of resort operations,” research conducted for this cultural landscape report indicates that the original use area was more extensive. The boundary also includes the “opposite shore of the bay, which constitutes much of the view-shed as can be seen from the lodge.” Although rather limited, the description of the setting and inclusion of views from the lodge imply that the landscape contributes to the property, indicating that a contributing site should be added to the counted resources. The existing boundary also includes the footprints of several guest cabins, outbuildings and other historic features relating to the period of resort operations. It is recommended that the nomination be updated to reflect the findings of this report.

The period of significance for the lodge is recorded as 1931-1957. The 1957 end date was based on the 50 year time period at the time of writing. This period of significance was assigned prior to the completion of the multiple-property National Register Nomination for Tourism and Recreational Development in Voyageurs National Park in 2008.⁸ Given the new information uncovered as part of this cultural landscape report, and the precedent set by properties nominated in association with the Voyageurs multiple-property nomination, it is recommended that the nomination be revised, extending the period of significance to 1980, the last year the property was operated as a resort. This would include the entire resort operation period, as well as the height of the operation, which occurred in the mid-1960s. In addition, it is recommended that the revised nomination include a description of the contributing landscape characteristics, including response to the natural environment, spatial organization, vegetation, circulation, topography, and small scale features. The landscape analysis provided in Chapter 4 includes an explanation of the integrity of each of these characteristics.

¹ Clayton, William J. *National Register Nomination, Chik Wauk Lodge, 2007, Section 8, page 1.*

² Clayton, William J. *National Register Nomination, Chik Wauk Lodge, 2007, Section 8, page 1.*

³ Clayton, William J. *National Register Nomination, Chik Wauk Lodge, 2007, Section 8, page 6.*

⁴ Quinn Evans Architects. *National Register Nomination, Tourism and Recreational Development in Voyageurs National Park, 2008.*

⁵ Quinn Evans Architects. *National Register Nomination, Tourism and Recreational Development in Voyageurs National Park, 2008, Section E, Page 2.*

⁶ Quinn Evans Architects. *National Register Nomination, Tourism and Recreational Development in Voyageurs National Park, 2008, Section E, Page 2.*

⁷ Quinn Evans Architects. *National Register Nomination, Tourism and Recreational Development in Voyageurs National Park, 2008.*

⁸ Quinn Evans Architects. *National Register Nomination, Tourism and Recreational Development in Voyageurs National Park, 2008.*