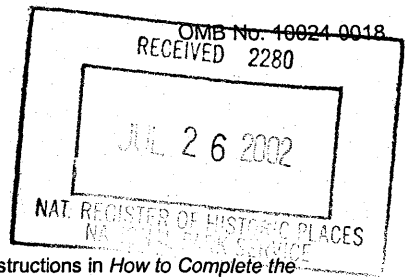


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



934

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Lester River Bridge (Bridge No. 5772)

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

Street & number London Road (Minnesota Highway 61) over the Lester River not for publication N/A

city or town Duluth vicinity N/A

state Minnesota code MN county St. Louis code 137 zip code 55804

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  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ian R. Stewart  
Signature of certifying official/Title Ian R. Stewart

7/23/02  
Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper  
Date of Action 9/6/02

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	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges in Minnesota

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: road-related (vehicular)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: road-related (vehicular)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: filled-spandrel concrete arch

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation (Substructure) Concrete

walls

roof

other (Superstructure) Stone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Lester River Bridge (Bridge No. 5772)

Name of Property

St. Louis 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.)

- X 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.
X 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.)

Property is: N/A

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed on 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 #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
X Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Minnesota Department of Transportation

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation

Engineering

Architecture

Period of Significance

1924-1925

Significant Dates

1925

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Morell, Anthony (Landscape Architect)

Nichols, Arthur R. (Landscape Architect)

Cruikshank, William H. (Engineer)

McLean, Charles Russell (Builder)

Lester River Bridge (Bridge No. 5772)

Name of Property

St. Louis County, Minnesota

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 575790 5187280
Zone Easting Northing

2

3 Zone Easting Northing

4

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger, Scott Kelly, and Kay Grossman

organization Gemini Research date Jan. 17, 2002

street & number 15 E. 9th St. telephone 320-589-3846

city or town Morris state MN zip code 56267

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications 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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington DC 20503.

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Lester River Bridge (Bridge 5772)  
Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota

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### 7. DESCRIPTION

The Lester River Bridge is a stone-faced concrete arch bridge that carries London Road-Congdon Boulevard (Minnesota Highway 61) over the Lester River in the northeastern portion of the city of Duluth. (See accompanying map entitled "Sketch Map, Lester River Bridge, Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota".) The bridge is aligned east and west and is located near the shore of Lake Superior. London Road is a street that extends westward from the bridge toward downtown Duluth. Congdon Boulevard is a street that begins at the eastern end of the bridge (at 61st Avenue East) and extends eastward about 13 miles to the Duluth city limits. (The name of the street changes from London Road to Congdon Boulevard at 61st Avenue East near the eastern end of the bridge.) The Lester River Bridge is known as Bridge 5772 by the Minnesota Department of Highways.

The Lester River Bridge was designed by landscape architects Morell and Nichols, with engineering assistance from Duluth city engineers William H. Cruikshank and John Wilson and additional design assistance from Minneapolis architects Tyrie and Chapman. The bridge was built in 1924-1925 by Duluth contractor C. R. McLean.

The Lester River Bridge is a single span, filled-spandrel, reinforced concrete arch bridge. The bridge has a span of 103.5 feet, concrete abutments, and earthen fill. There are six concrete ribs exposed within the barrel of the arch. The top of the arch rises 18' above the spring line.

The bridge's total length is approximately 165' and it is about 50' wide (outside dimensions). The bridge was designed to carry two 18'-wide driving lanes and two 5'-wide walkways. Today it continues to carry two bituminous-paved driving lanes and two poured concrete sidewalks of approximately the original widths.

The design of the bridge was influenced by the Neo-Classical Revival style. The bridge's headwalls and railings (also called parapets) are faced with random ashlar, rockfaced gabbro in dark shades of brown, black, red, and green. (Gabbro is a dark, igneous, coarse-grained rock that is abundant in the Duluth area.) The gabbro is laid with light-colored, raked mortar joints. The gabbro is trimmed with light gray, speckled Cold Spring granite that was quarried near Rockville, Minnesota. The light gray granite was used for voussoirs along the bridge's wide shallow arch and for coping along the top and bottom of the railings.

The bridge has a 28"-square gabbro pier, which is topped by a gray granite finial, at the end of each railing. The bridge railings originally supported four stone lamp standards on which were mounted electric lamps. The standards rose above the four narrow blind arches that continue to decorate the bridge's headwalls on either side of the span. The lamp standards were removed by the state highway department in 1973 because of deteriorating mortar and missing stones.

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Lester River Bridge (Bridge 5772)  
Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota

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The Lester River Bridge's original date plate is also missing. Plans from 1924 specify that the date plate was to be a polished metal tablet that read: "Erected 1924 by Joint Contribution of Chester A. Congdon Estate, City of Duluth and County of St. Louis" (*General Plan 1924*). The Minnesota Department of Highways added metal guardrails to the ends of the bridge in 1975. The guardrails are 35' long at the western end of the bridge and 60' and 150' long at the eastern end.

The setting of the Lester River Bridge is essentially intact. The bridge is located at the mouth of the Lester River at the point where the river flows into Lake Superior. North of the bridge, the river runs through a picturesque, rocky, wooded gorge as it approaches the lake. The gorge is characterized by gabbro bluffs and mature coniferous and deciduous trees. The gorge is preserved by the City of Duluth. Part of the river gorge is within Lester Park, a 46-acre city park that was established in 1890. A public footpath and Lester River Road (a city street that is also known as 61st Ave. E.) travel along the upper edge of the river gorge on the eastern side of the river. There is a circa 1980 concrete stairway leading from this footpath down to the river bank north of the eastern end of the bridge. Northwest of the bridge is an open grassy lawn with mature deciduous and coniferous trees. This land is owned by the City of Duluth. Northeast of the bridge (on the eastern side of Lester River Road) is a water quality laboratory that is operated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Residential neighborhoods extend farther out to the west, northwest, and northeast.

South of the bridge, the Lester River flows into Lake Superior at a rocky beach. Southwest of the bridge there are tall grasses and wildflowers on the river bank. Informal footpaths lead from the southwestern and southeastern ends of the bridge down to the river and lakeshore. Southwest of the bridge is the former U.S. Fisheries Station-Duluth. Built in 1885-1886, the Fisheries Station is an Eastlake Style building that was listed on the National Register in 1978. It is now the University of Minnesota-Duluth's Limnological Research Station. Southeast of the bridge is Brighton Beach, a former city-owned campground that is now a lakeside city park.

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Lester River Bridge (Bridge 5772)  
Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota

### 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Lester River Bridge, built in 1924-1925 in the city of Duluth, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A, significance to the broad patterns of our history, in the area of Transportation, and under Criterion C, design significance, in the area of Engineering. Historically, the bridge is important as a significant component of Duluth's street and parkway system, and for its associations with the construction of Minnesota Highway 1, one of the state's most important early trunk highways. Architecturally, the concrete arch span bridge is significant for its outstanding Neo-Classical Revival design and for its span length of greater than 100'. The bridge is significant on a statewide level.

The Lester River Bridge meets the registration requirements for National Register Criterion A that are contained in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) entitled "Reinforced Concrete Highway Bridges, 1900-1945." The MPDF recommends as eligible bridges that are "associated with the design and construction of the earliest designated trunk highways following the 1921 creation of the state trunk highway system" (Frame 1988:F7). The Lester River Bridge was constructed in conjunction with the original construction of Minnesota Highway 1 and, when the bridge was completed, was considered the "gateway" to the North Shore portion of the highway ("Duluth Adds 11 Miles," Jan. 1, 1926).

The Lester River Bridge also meets the registration requirements for National Register Criterion C that are contained in the MPDF. The MPDF recommends that bridges "designed with outstanding architectural style or ornamentation" are eligible under Criterion C. The MPDF explains that "these bridges represent extraordinary aesthetic efforts to enhance a crossing at an important location. They are usually found in significant and prominent urban settings, such as city approaches and entrances, and in park settings, either urban or rural" (Frame 1988:F8). In its discussion of physical alterations, the MPDF explains that "original light standards often have been removed; this does not make the bridge ineligible, but original light standards do enhance significance" (Frame 1988:F8). With a span length of 103.5', the Lester River Bridge also meets the MPDF recommendation that reinforced concrete bridges with "span length of monumental proportions (i.e., 100 feet and over)" are eligible under Criterion C for their engineering significance. As it considers bridges by sub-type, the MPDF recommends that concrete "arch span" bridges of "100 feet and over" are eligible under Criterion C. Again, the MPDF explains that such bridges "represent extraordinary engineering efforts to push a particular span sub-type to its limits to solve an unusual site problem, and are rare" (Frame 1988:F8).

The Lester River Bridge has also been recommended as being eligible for the National Register for its aesthetic significance by the 1997 comprehensive *Management Plan for Minnesota's Historic Bridges* (Roise and Hess 1997). The management plan was prepared for the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) as part of the Minnesota Historic Bridge Inventory. (The inventory was cosponsored by Mn/DOT and the Minnesota Historical Society.) Because of the bridge's unusual aesthetics, the management plan also includes the bridge among a group of

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Lester River Bridge (Bridge 5772)  
Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota

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bridges recommended to receive a higher level of maintenance than other historic highway bridges in Minnesota (Roise and Hess 1997:9-10).

### Construction of the Bridge

The Lester River Bridge was constructed in 1924-1925 with funds contributed by the City of Duluth, St. Louis County, and the family of Chester A. Congdon. The bridge was built in conjunction with the construction of Congdon Boulevard, a roadway that stretches along the shoreline of Lake Superior from the Lester River northeastward to the county line. The Lester River Bridge did not replace a previous bridge, but instead provided the first river crossing at this location.

The Lester River Bridge was built as a component of the acclaimed parkway system that the City of Duluth had been steadily developing since 1889. (See Nunnally 1997 for a study of the system.) Construction of the bridge allowed vehicles to cross the Lester River near the shore of Lake Superior, rather than crossing the river away from the shore on Superior Street, which is north of the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad tracks. By providing a lakeshore crossing, the bridge allowed traffic to continue along the scenic shoreline northeastward out of the city. Construction of the Lester River Bridge occurred during a period of substantial expansion of the Duluth street and parkway system. The Lester River Bridge and Congdon Boulevard were just two of the many improvements made to the system by the city during this period in the 1920s and 1930s (Nunnally 1997:97). At the time that the bridge was completed in 1925, Duluth was Minnesota's third largest city with a population of 105,400 people.

In its contribution to the construction of the bridge, the family of Duluth businessman and iron ore magnate Chester A. Congdon (then deceased) was following wishes Congdon had articulated as early as 1913 when he first began to plan Congdon Boulevard. Congdon historian Roy Hoover explains:

Spurred on, perhaps, by his working on Glensheen [his 1908 lakeshore residence on London Road], Congdon expanded his interest in the environment. He became particularly interested in preserving the natural beauty along the north shore of Lake Superior. For many years, the lack of transportation along the shore [northeast of the Lester River] had discouraged developers, and only a few fishermen lived there. It was evident, however, that with the expansion of Duluth and the surrounding area it would not be long before the beauty of the north shore would be taken over by private builders and lost to the public forever. Congdon was determined to preserve for public benefit at least part of this spectacular scenery (Hoover 1997:60).

Congdon first funded land acquisition for the road, agreeing in June of 1913 to give money to the city to buy land along 13 miles of shoreline. Congdon's gift "contained a proviso that the land be preserved in its natural state and never be used for any purpose other than a highway" (Hoover 1997:61). The agreement was apparently refined, or perhaps additional money was allocated, in



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June of 1915 when the *Duluth Herald* reported: "Chester A. Congdon's offer to pay all the awards, claims, and expenses of the lakeshore boulevard from Lester Park to Two Harbors, a distance of about 29 miles, was formally accepted by the City Commission. More than \$40,000 will be paid by Mr. Congdon as awards to property owners and for expenses in surveying the highway" (quoted in Nunnally 1997:41).

Congdon died in 1916 before Congdon Boulevard was built. The eventual construction of the road was spurred by the state highway department's plans to build a new trunk highway, Minnesota Highway 1, along the North Shore as part of the state's new trunk highway system (Nunnally 1997:97). It was planned that Congdon Boulevard would become part of Minnesota Highway 1 in association with the state highway department's desire to make Minnesota Highway 1 a scenic shoreline route. In circa 1923 Congdon Boulevard was planned by Minneapolis landscape architects Morell and Nichols, who also designed the Lester River Bridge. Costs to build the boulevard (like construction costs for the bridge) were evenly divided between the Congdon family, the city, and the county (Northwest Architectural Archives; Nunnally 1997:41). The concrete paved roadway was built between 1923 and 1925. The Lester River Bridge, located at the "beginning" of Congdon Boulevard, was built in 1924-1925.

The Lester River Bridge was designed by Minneapolis landscape architects Morell and Nichols with engineering assistance from William H. Cruikshank and John Wilson, both of Duluth's city engineering office. Two early proposed designs for the Lester River Bridge are preserved in the Morell and Nichols collection in the University of Minnesota's Northwest Architectural Archives. The drawings, both undated, propose bridges that are more Rustic in style than the final design. They feature larger and more angular pieces of gabbro and fewer Neo-Classical Revival details. (These two early designs are somewhat similar to Morell and Nichols' designs for the bridges on Duluth's Seven Bridges Road nearby.) Only one of the two early drawings has lamp standards on the bridge. Both drawings show the bridge within its river gorge setting surrounded by dramatic rock outcroppings and picturesque pines (Northwest Architectural Archives).

Only a partial set of construction plans has been located for the final version of the Lester River Bridge (*General Plan* 1924). These plans, dated March 1924, indicate that they were drawn by William H. Cruikshank "from recommendations by Morell and Nichols, landscape architects and engineers" (*General Plan* 1924). Morell and Nichols were apparently hired again by the city in June of 1924 to provide additional design details (City Council Proceedings 1924). According to the *Duluth News Tribune*, Minneapolis architects Tyrie and Chapman also assisted Morell and Nichols with the final design ("Duluth Adds 11 Miles," Jan. 1, 1926).

While the bridge design was being refined, the Duluth Commissioner of Public Works advertised for bids in May of 1924. The construction contract was awarded a month later to Duluth contractor C. R. McLean on his bid of \$52,644.80 (City Council Proceedings 1924). After McLean was given a time extension on his contract, the bridge was completed in the spring of 1925. Morell died in October of 1924 while the Lester River Bridge project was underway.

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Little is known of the actual progress of construction. However, the name of one of the stonemasons, Emil Miller, has been identified. Miller's grandson, Bruce Miller, recalls his grandfather stating that he helped construct the Lester River Bridge and several stone bridges along Seven Bridges Road. Bruce Miller believes that during the 1930s his grandfather also helped build the state highway department's stone scenic overlook at Duluth's Thompson Hill, a rock wall along Duluth's Skyline Drive near 40th Ave. W., and several other Works Progress Administration (WPA) projects along the North Shore. Emil Miller reportedly quit the masonry trade during World War II to work in a steel plant in Duluth (Miller 1998).

Dedication ceremonies for the newly-completed Minnesota Highway 1 (and the newly-completed Congdon Boulevard) were held on the Lester River Bridge in September of 1925. The celebration, which was organized by the Duluth Automobile Club, included a parade led by the U.S. Naval Reserve Band. The parade moved from central Duluth to the Lester River Bridge where the speeches were held. Speakers included Duluth Mayor S. F. Snively, Judge C. R. Magney, County Commissioner W. H. Tischer, and Congdon family representative E. C. Congdon. In announcing the dedication ceremonies, the *Duluth News Tribune* wrote that, ". . . it [will now] be possible for traffic to continue from the end of London Road to Knife River [the city limits] on pavement, and from there to Port Arthur [the Canadian border] on graveled roadway" (*Duluth News Tribune*, Sept. 18, 1925). A photograph of the new bridge figures prominently in a *Duluth Herald* article on the dedication (*Duluth Herald*, Sept. 25, 1925).

A *Duluth News Tribune* article summarizing construction progress in the year 1925 states, "The chief construction feat of the year was the paving of Congdon Boulevard and the erection of the Lester River bridge at the boulevard's juncture with London Road" ("Duluth Adds 11 Miles," Jan. 1, 1926). The article quotes a city engineer's statement which reads, "The outstanding project of the season was the completion of the Congdon Boulevard and the Lester River bridge. This project embodied many landscape and artistic features not ordinarily associated with highway or street improvements, that were handsomely taken care of by leading specialists in this line of work" ("Duluth Adds 11 Miles," Jan. 1, 1926).

Under the subheading "Bridge is Work of Art," the newspaper quotes further from the city engineer's statement:

The bridge is constructed of reinforced concrete faced with native stone carefully selected both as to color and texture. The trimmings are of granite from Rockville, Minn. The lanterns and lantern supports are of special design to harmonize with the delicate yet substantial lines of the bridge. The lanterns are painted to conform with the granite trimmings, while the glass was specially rolled and burned to give the diffusion of light and shade desired, Mr. Nichols of Morell and Nichols giving much of his personal attention to this small but important detail. The landscape feature of the work was planned by Mr. Morell, the architectural problems by Morell and Nichols aided by Tyrie

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Lester River Bridge (Bridge 5772)  
Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota

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and Chapman, also of Minneapolis, while the detail plans were prepared in our office ("Duluth Adds 11 Miles," Jan. 1, 1926).

When it was completed, the Lester River Bridge joined several other stone bridges as aesthetic highlights of Duluth's street and parkway system. These bridges included a series of Rustic Style stone bridges (extant) on Seven Bridges Road that were designed by Morell and Nichols and built in 1910-1911. Interestingly, the Lester River Bridge is stylistically similar to another bridge west of downtown in Lincoln Park that carries Tenth Street over Miller Creek (extant). This bridge was built by the city in 1927. Further research is necessary to verify its designer, but stylistically it appears to be another Morell and Nichols design.

Today, the Lester River Bridge is still regarded by many as the gateway to Lake Superior's North Shore. Travel author Shawn Perich writes: ". . . the North Shore begins at Twelfth Avenue East in Duluth -- the starting point for State Highway 61 [formerly Highway 1]. However, not until you cross the Lester River Bridge do you first see the lake up close and leave the city behind. For most of us, this marks the real beginning of the North Shore Drive" (Perich 1992:2).

### Minnesota Highway 1

In addition to its significance to the city of Duluth, the Lester River Bridge is associated with the early development of Minnesota Highway 1. Called both the "North Shore Drive" and the "Lake Superior International Highway," Minnesota Highway 1 (now Minnesota Highway 61) was an important part of the state's original trunk highway system. A 1926 newspaper article about the Lester River Bridge called the bridge "the city's gateway to the famous North Shore Drive" ("Duluth Adds 11 Miles," Jan. 1, 1926).

At the time that Minnesota's trunk highway system was established in 1921, existing roads along the North Shore of Lake Superior between Duluth and the Canadian border were primitive. The state highway department planned to build major sections of the new Minnesota Highway 1 on a lakeshore alignment to improve the efficiency of the route and to take advantage of the unsurpassed scenic qualities of the world's largest freshwater lake. In Duluth, the construction of the Lester River Bridge (along with the building of Congdon Boulevard) allowed the new highway to be aligned along the shore of the lake, rather than following Superior Street, a pre-existing, parallel road. Superior Street was not a lakeside road and was blocked from the lakeshore by the tracks of the Duluth and Iron Range Railroad.

Minnesota Highway 1 extended from the Iowa border to the Canadian border. It served as the principal highway between the Twin Cities and the city of Duluth, and was an important route between the Twin Cities and northern Minnesota recreational areas. North of Duluth, the highway was the only thoroughfare to serve the entire northern shore of Lake Superior including towns such as Two Harbors and Grand Marais. Minnesota Highway 1 also provided sole access into Minnesota from the Canadian North Shore. By 1925, the entire route between Duluth and the Canadian border had been graded, some portions had been graded and graveled, and

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Lester River Bridge (Bridge 5772)  
Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota

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Congdon Boulevard -- the section northeast of the Lester River -- had been paved with concrete (Ketz and Alexander 1993:36).

The opening of Minnesota Highway 1 in 1925 was "a critical factor in the recreational development of the North Shore" (Long 1996:10). Although some tourists had been visiting the area since the late 19th century, construction of an all-weather road allowed automobiles to efficiently travel the North Shore for the first time. Because major sections of the new highway had been specifically designed to provide outstanding views of the lake, it became one of the state's most important scenic routes.

In 1926, after lobbying by local groups, the highway was given a descriptive name by the highway department -- the "Lake Superior International Highway." Also around 1926, Minnesota Highway 1 between the Twin Cities and Canada was designated part of U.S. Highway 61, a major north-south interstate route. In 1934 Minnesota Highway 1 between the Twin Cities and Canada was renamed Minnesota Highway 61 as part of a statewide renumbering effort that tried to match state highway numbers with U.S. highway numbers.

The *Duluth News Tribune* wrote in 1926, "Perhaps nowhere in the United States will the tourist and the vacationist find more to interest and charm them, more scenic beauty and better camping and fishing facilities, than along Minnesota state highway No. 1, especially that portion of it that runs through and north of Duluth into the Arrowhead country, now famous as the playground of the nation" (*Duluth News Tribune*, Dec. 26, 1926).

In 1959, the North Shore highway was ranked as one of the top three scenic highways in the nation by the National Association of Travel Organizations. The highway tied for second place with U.S. Highway 101 along the Pacific Coast as the most scenic major highway in the country. The highway that ranked first in the poll was the Blue Ridge Parkway, which travels through Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee (*Duluth News Tribune*, July 29, 1959).

### Morell and Nichols

Minneapolis landscape architects Morell and Nichols designed the Lester River Bridge with assistance from Duluth engineers William H. Cruikshank and John Wilson, and additional design help from Minneapolis architects Tyrie and Chapman.

Arthur R. Nichols (1880-1970) and Anthony Morell (1875-1924) had worked together in the office of New York City landscape architect Charles W. Leavitt, Jr., around 1908 before forming a partnership and moving to Minnesota. Leavitt had been commissioned to design the landscaping for Chester A. Congdon's new home in Duluth called Glensheen (built in 1908), and Morell and Nichols apparently became acquainted with Duluth and with Mr. Congdon while working for Leavitt on the Glensheen project. In 1909 the two men left Leavitt, moved to Minnesota, and opened an office in Minneapolis.

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Lester River Bridge (Bridge 5772)  
Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota

During their first decades in business, Morell and Nichols were commissioned by the City of Duluth to design numerous parks, parkways, and bridges. For example, the firm planned designs or redesigns of Lester Park (1910, 1912), Congdon Park (1910), Hillcrest Park (1911), Portman Square (1910, 1911), Washington Square (1911), Central Park (1911, 1912), and Lakeshore Park (1912) (Northwest Architectural Archives). Several of the parks included footbridges. Morell and Nichols designed a series of stone bridges on Seven Bridges Road that were built in 1910-1911. Their work in Duluth in the 1920s included designs for the Lester River Bridge (built 1924-1925) and Congdon Boulevard (built 1923-1925).

Anthony Morell died in October of 1924, while the Lester River Bridge was under construction. Nichols, who had graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with both landscape architecture and engineering training, continued to practice until 1960 when he retired at the age of 80. Throughout a long and prolific career, Nichols became one of Minnesota's most prominent landscape architects. He is credited with playing a major role in establishing the profession of landscape architecture in the state.

Nichols designed numerous college campuses, state parks, urban master plans, and private estates. He became an expert in highway improvement, and from 1932 through circa 1940 served as the first Consulting Landscape Architect for the Minnesota Department of Highway's Roadside Development Division. During decades of consulting for the State of Minnesota, he planned dozens of state facilities including hospitals, prisons, parks, colleges, and other institutions. Between 1910 and 1952 he consulted for the University of Minnesota on numerous projects on at least five separate campuses. He also designed the State Capitol Approach in St. Paul (1944-1950) and worked on several Minnesota state parks during the 1950s.

### **William H. Cruikshank**

William H. Cruikshank (1865-1942) was a City of Duluth civil engineer when he participated in the design of the Lester River Bridge. Cruikshank had moved to Duluth around 1890, and as a city engineer helped design several Duluth bridges. Cruikshank was active in civic and fraternal affairs, serving as secretary of the Euclid Lodge of the Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. He died in 1942 in Duluth (*Duluth News Tribune*, July 25, 1942).

### **C. R. McLean**

The Lester River Bridge was constructed by prominent Duluth contractor C. R. McLean. C. Russell McLean was born in Duluth and attended Duluth schools and the University of Minnesota. Before starting his contracting business, McLean worked in the Duluth city engineer's office. McLean's company built several bridges and roadways in the Duluth area including the 1928 western extension of the Skyline Drive parkway through Jay Cooke State Park. McLean's son, C. Russell McLean, Jr., also became a contractor in Duluth. McLean, Sr., died in 1969 at the age of 82. He had been active in civic affairs, serving as a member of the

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Kitchi Gammi Club, the Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce, and on the building committee of the YWCA (*Duluth News Tribune*, July 27, 1969).

### **Tyrie and Chapman**

The Minneapolis architectural firm of Tyrie and Chapman apparently contributed final design details for the bridge. William W. Tyrie (1874-1943) and George A. Chapman practiced together in New York City from 1897-1898, and again in Minneapolis from 1908-1926 (part of the time with Charles E. Bell). The firm specialized in the design of public buildings including courthouses and schools.

In conclusion, the Lester River Bridge is significant as an important component of the city of Duluth's street and parkway system, and for its significant associations with the construction of Minnesota Highway 1, one of the state's most important early trunk highways. The concrete arch span bridge is also significant architecturally for its outstanding Neo-Classical Revival design and for its concrete arch span length of greater than 100'.

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"William H. Cruikshank." *Duluth News Tribune*, July 25, 1942.

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### 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA, CONTINUED

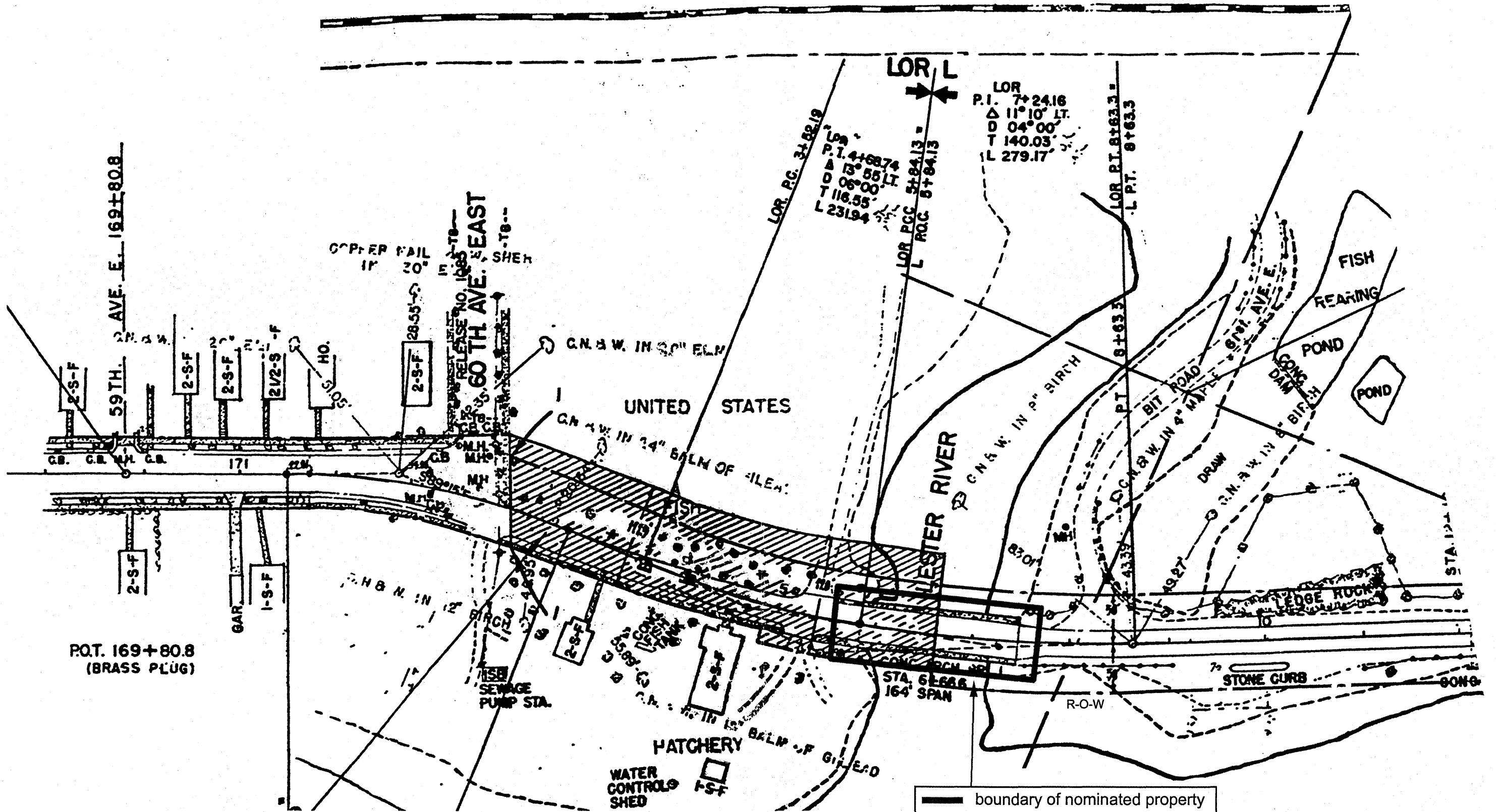
#### Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is shown by the solid line on the accompanying map entitled "Site Boundaries, Lester River Bridge, Duluth, St. Louis County, Minnesota." (The base map for this sheet is a Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) Right-of-Way Map.) The nominated property measures 205' by 70'. The property is located within the city of Duluth.

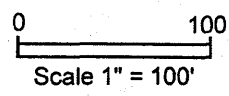
#### Boundary Justification

The nominated property is comprised of the parcel of land historically associated with the Lester River Bridge.

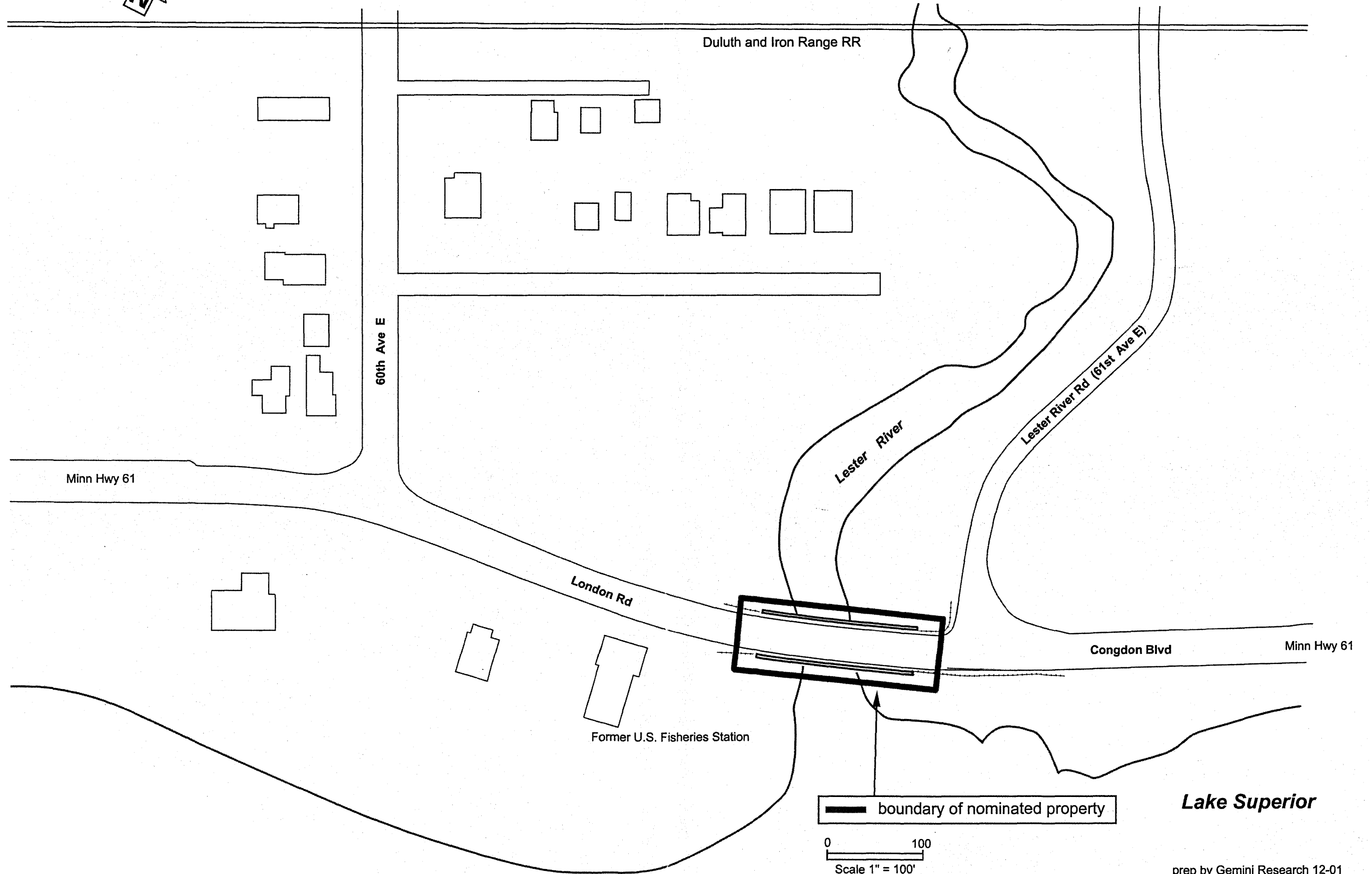
Site Boundaries  
 Lester River Bridge  
 Duluth, St. Louis Co., Minnesota



— boundary of nominated property



**Sketch Map**  
**Lester River Bridge**  
Duluth, St. Louis Co., Minnesota



**Lake Superior**