



**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
April 2018**

With our New York State Chapter hosting the FFLA Northeastern Conference in just a few short months, it seems like an ideal time to let you all know about the development of this organization. It is well described here by Bob Spear, our recently retired historian and past Observer at Sterling Forest Fire Tower:

*In 1990, 7 folks from the Northeast got together in a cold cement-floored maintenance building at French Creek State Park, Pennsylvania. None of us knew what we really expected to come from this, except we were all involved in some way with Fire Towers and what their job was. None of us actually knew, aside from our own States, who else in the country used them. None of us actually had given it much thought.*

*As we slowly got to know each other and what we represented, there came a realization, we might have a good idea growing here. It began to get very exciting and as Keith Argow later coined the "phrase" "LOOKOUT MAGIC" began to take form. As a small State, New Jersey, situated between Pennsylvania and New York State and to a lesser degree, Delaware and Maryland to the South had a knowledge of what our fire towers were for. The three of us from New Jersey were very familiar with the fire towers we had nearby where we lived. Ramapo, Bearfort, Milton, Culvers, and Sterling in New York State. But none of us actually knew the "History" of them.*

*Henry Isenberg from Massachusetts was very knowledgeable about his State's fire towers and of those in Maine and a few other New England States. Steve Cummings was quickly recognized as the "Grand Wizard" of all things "Fire tower" and seemed to have the most contact of all of us with the subject outside his own "Keystone State" (as he called it). Chris Hartz from New Hampshire filled us in on the Granite State's situation with "lookouts" (a term we were not actually familiar with). Joe Higgins from New Jersey had the very high morality of a practicing attorney who had once worked for the FBI and was a local Fire Chief. John and Cindy Livesey also from New Jersey were very much involved with their Section Fire crew and myself, a native New Jerseyian had always had a knack for all things of a Historical nature. The "History" of fire towers naturally fell right into that interest. Through the intrepid activities of our mischievous Fire Warden who always seemed to have the "pot boiling somewhere" I became one of his traveling sidekicks in the big red crash-bar equipped power wagon that seemed to bull-doze it's way to brush fire calls no matter which side of the State border it was !*

*But back to that first meeting of like-minded people.....*

*By the time we were ready to depart the snowy landscape of Pennsylvania's Dutch country and head East again, our group had grown by another three arrivals. Some very important decisions had been made. We agreed to start a "Newsletter", we had established editors for this. Mr Cummings had agreed to be our interim Chairman and we agreed how to run future meetings in a business-like manner. Our attorney friend from New Jersey volunteered to start working on a "non-profit status" and laid down the issues that would need to be established to work toward Incorporation status. We agreed on our next meeting site where we would try to establish an official name. (In New Jersey in the late Spring)*

*We talked about creating some sort of a "hand-out" paper to spread around the Forestry World to make*

others aware of our ideas....."LOOKOUT MAGIC" was in full bloom!

Perhaps one of the most satisfying events that happened was that we all began to realize we were in this together and were working as a team. In the coming months, ideas were continually exchanged. There was NO Facebook, only an Internet that successful people could afford to buy a relatively NEW idea called "Computers". The mailbox and the Telephone were our means of communications, then, (an absolutely ancient start compared to today's "Instant" methods)!

Ideas about the actual "History" of fire towers (i.e. "Lookouts") slowly began to take shape and the revelations that other States in other areas of the country also had them was literally mind-boggling! When I got my hands on some old Annual Report Books and started reading them, a whole world of that History started taking shape. A trip to Steve Cumming's office at Evansburg, Pennsylvania where he had accumulated a voluminous library of Conservation books on the subject was an eye-opener. Meeting members of his fire crew there and traveling to a recent brush fire scene where Steve and I walked among the still smoldering embers and tried to find the ignition source and then later at his office, studying old black & white fire tower photographs we discussed at length his ideas of what this venture could develop into.

By the ending of the second meeting in New Jersey, we had welcomed more people to our growing group of "Enthusiasts" which we had here-to-for called ourselves. Keith Argow from Virginia, Gary Weber from Idaho, Caroline Parmenter from Maine, Iris and Bill Baird from New Hampshire, Greg Tyrell (a NYSDEC Forest Ranger), Fred Knauf, Larry Paul, Melanie Creer and Chief Ranger Tim Sullivan from New York State and more folks from New Jersey's A & B Divisions from New Jersey. "LOOKOUT MAGIC" was alive and well!

More importantly, we had decided on an "Official name" which would be voted on at the next meeting in Foxborough, Massachusetts. Joe Higgins explained the "Incorporation and non-profit efforts underway." We had our first State Reports from Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Idaho and were introduced through his books of "Fire Lookouts of the Northwest" by Ray Kresek of Spokane, Washington. The "idea" of having State Representatives was discussed among others.

The "History" of what would become the FFLA was well underway!.....Rudder amidships and Flank Speed ahead! Flash ahead to 2019 and here it is 29 years later! "LOOKOUT MAGIC" is still on all burners !



Thank you Bob! Would you like to feel that magic? Join us in Mount Tremper for the conference and that same magic can be yours!

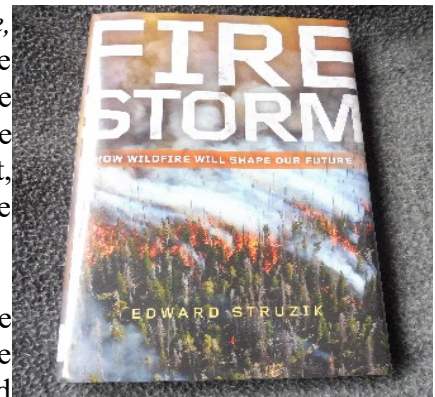
## News from Around the State

**Sterling Forest:** Meanwhile the good work at Sterling Forest continues. Susan Serico, the Chair of the Volunteer program there reports, "I'm thrilled to report the ADK, North Jersey Chapter, came through with a very generous donation to be used to purchase the materials needed to replace the windows in the cab. Mike and his crew will fabricate the windows in the same style as the original ones. Visitors to the tower will have a much enhanced viewing experience once the windows are in place." Such great news! Thank you to the North Jersey Chapter! And if you would like to volunteer, Susan is still looking for some volunteers for this summer. Please contact her at [sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com](mailto:sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com)

**Azure:** The Azure Mountain Friends have been awarded a \$13,500 grant from [Parks & Trails New York](#), to replace the eroded cedar steps on the summit with stone steps, and to restore the area to a more natural state. Work will start sometime after the snow melts. Stay tuned for updates. Perhaps you will be able to lend a hand?

**CIC Tower Update:** After several years of waiting, the new fire tower at the Catskill Interpretive Center may become a reality in 2019. Our very own Dave Vana has been busy dismantling the fire tower that will be placed at the CIC while enjoying some time in the south. The CIC is at a fairly low elevation and the trees there are very tall, so a taller tower was necessary. This model will be somewhat different than the other 5 Catskill Fire Towers in its design as well. Stay tuned for more. If you attend the FFLA NE Conference, you will be nearby and get a chance to check on the progress. [https://www.yoursun.com/venice/news/venice-fire-tower-heads-to-catskills/article\\_896eae6e-450b-11e9-b0a1-f75f40be8bc4.html](https://www.yoursun.com/venice/news/venice-fire-tower-heads-to-catskills/article_896eae6e-450b-11e9-b0a1-f75f40be8bc4.html)

**Book of the month:** *Firestorm: How Wildfire Will Shape Our Future*, by Edward Struzik. Struzik wrote this book shortly after the devastating Fort McMurray fire in Canada in 2016. In this book, he discusses fire science and perhaps has some controversial opinions. He speaks about the fire triangle having a very important 4<sup>th</sup> side to it, politics and how that is shaping policies. And all of this before the devastating Carr fire in California in 2018. This book is a must read.



Learning about wildfires is an ongoing process. From the Firehouse Magazine June 2018 issue - "On June 30, 2013, 19 members of the Granite Mountain Interagency Hotshot Crew (IHC) were entrapped and lost their lives on the Yarnell Hill Fire in Arizona. In the fire service, we honor our fallen by learning from them. With the five-year anniversary approaching, this is a good time to ask a question: What have we learned from this accident?" <https://www.firelinefactors.com/resources>

**Game:** We have had mention of electronic games relating to fire towers before, but I think this game may be the first board game: <https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/226605/fire-tower>. "You must protect your tower with all the resources at your disposal: dispatch fire engines to combat the blaze, order air drops of water, and plan the building of firebreaks. Competing fire departments will complicate your work, using the unrelenting winds to their advantage in an attempt to safeguard their own towers and threaten yours." Sounds like fun.

**Renting a fire tower:** Perhaps some day you may wish to. I know I do.

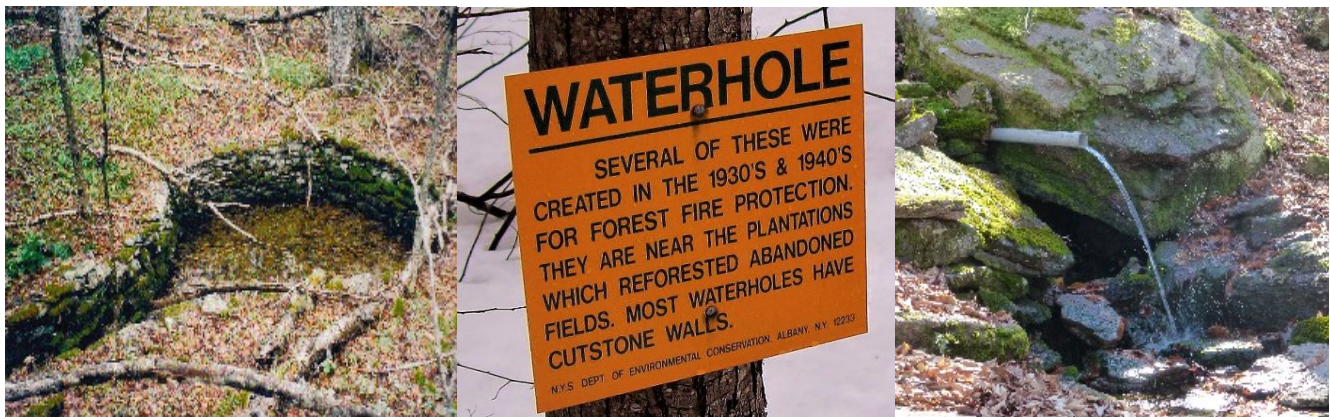
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/old-fire-lookouts-offer-sleepovers-with-history-panoramas-and-unexpected-comfort/2019/03/14/705b4bbe-3ae6-11e9-aaae-69364b2ed137\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/old-fire-lookouts-offer-sleepovers-with-history-panoramas-and-unexpected-comfort/2019/03/14/705b4bbe-3ae6-11e9-aaae-69364b2ed137_story.html)



**Trivia:** What is the name of the company located in NYS who developed a portable water container for fighting wildfires? Probably too easy, I better be sure my sticker collection is full.

## Water

April is a good time to talk about water. Water has important relationships to fire towers for several reasons. In April, as temperatures rise, the snows melt. Much of the water from spring melt goes into streams, making crossings for Observers reporting to work difficult. It also made mud – lots and lots of mud! Sometimes Observers reporting to work often found their roads impassable due to deep mud. But eventually the leaf litter lying on the ground from the fall dries out. Winds help that drying process. Spring wild fires begin. The Observer's job is to be on high alert now. 2019 is no different than many other years. <http://westchester.news12.com/story/40255121/brush-fire-forces-blooming-grove-officials-to-declare-state-of-emergency>



Water is also an important component in stopping a fire. But, where is that nearest water source? It could be a fire truck, it could be from a pond, from a plane or helicopter, or from a wildland fire fighter's back. This month, thanks to member Bill H., (photo above center), I learned something new about fire ponds. They were referred to as Water Holes.

In some locations in the Adirondacks, there are signs about these. As I understand the construction process, these were earthen sided ponds that were dug, then had laid up dry stone walls to keep the side walls from caving in. The CCC was responsible for many of the water holes/fire ponds in NYS. In the old Conservation Commission reports and the CCC camp records, the number of water holes built were carefully recorded. I always have marveled at the craftsmanship that went into building these fire ponds or water holes. Left above is a photo of one along the Millbrook Road, a perfect keyhole shape with steps that lead you down into the pond. It is lovely to look at as well as functional. Photo courtesy of Betty Baker.

Water was also an important commodity for the Observer in their tower in terms of sustenance. It is very rare in NYS to have a spring available at the summit where the fire tower was. The Observer often had to walk downhill quite some distance to a water source for drinking, cooking, and bathing needs. Rumor has it some springs were even blasted to make the gathering of water easier. Several forms of containers were used to carry and store the water. Many older photographs show stoneware crocks, more modern photos metal canteens. Some Observers even hauled water for gardening, though often it was captured via eave troughs into a rain barrel. The fresh vegetables from that garden made every gallon one hauled worth it. Red Hill spring above right.

## Calendar

April 22: Hudson Valley – help needed to paint over graffiti on a fire tower. Please let me know if you can assist.

June 1-2, 2019: Volunteers needed for work on a fire tower in the Adirondacks. Interested? Please let me know.

Saturday, June 15, 2019 at 9:00 am the Friends of Mt. Arab trail work day with the Adirondack Mountain Club will take place. This will be similar to last year – cleaning water bars and perhaps doing one of the short trail re-routes if time allows. Anyone interested should sign up at the ADK website: <https://www.adk.org/workshops-and-special-events/>

Tuesday, July 16, 2019 The Town of Horicon Historical Society in Brant Lake will be holding a Meet the Forest Rangers event.

Friday, August 2, 2019 – Sunday, August 4, 2019 will be the Centennial Celebration for Balsam Lake Mountain. Events will be held at Morgan Outdoors in Livingston Manor on August 2nd, at the summit on August 3rd, and at the Dry Brook Community Hall on August 4th.

Thursday, August 8, 2019 will be a reception and program to celebrate Hurricane Fire tower's centennial at the Elizabethtown museum.

Saturday and Sunday, August 10th and 11th, 2019 Friends of Hurricane Mountain will host hikes to the fire tower and Observers cabin as part of their celebration.

Tuesday, August 13, 2019 the The Town of Horicon Historical Society in Brant Lake will be holding an Adirondack History talk by Historian, Mark Friden.

Saturday, August 24, 2019, The Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower will be holding their centennial celebration.

Saturday, August 31, 2019, Fire Tower Lighting Event Date  
Sunday, September 1, 2019, Fire Tower Lighting Event Rain Date

**Grant Funding Available:** The Matt Walters Fund. At our Annual Meeting in January, our Chairman, Keith Argow advised us that Mr. Walter had donated funds to the FFLA to be used for tower projects, preferably in the northeast. Those funds are now available using the following criteria:

- 1 - Requests should come from a group rather than an individual or an agency.
- 2 - The group should demonstrate good organizational structure.
- 3 - Request should show a solid, workable restoration proposal, including time frames, how grant funds will be used, and other sources of funding.
- 4 - Preference will be given to New England and Northeastern US projects.

**There is a May 15<sup>th</sup> deadline.** At that time, requests will be evaluated and awards determined, based on available funding (currently \$2000.00). Grant requests should be sent to the chapter director to forward to the Chairman and Treasurer who will consult with Mr. Walter as needed.

**2019 FFLA North Eastern Conference**  
June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>

The 2019 FFLA Northeastern Regional Conference will be held in Mount Tremper, NY. Mount Tremper is located west of the New York State Thruway from Kingston.

The event will take place at the Mount Tremper Fire Hall aka Oteora Hose Co Meeting Hall on Ingersol Rd. Rt 28 west, Rt 212 in Mt Tremper, Wittenberg Rd to Ingersol.

Fire Tower visits for early arrivals on Friday, June 7<sup>h</sup> might include Ferncliff, Roosa Gap, or Mohonk towers.

Friday night will be a short board meeting open to the public.

Saturday, June 8<sup>th</sup> we will gather at the Mount Tremper fire hall for the presentations by guest speakers beginning at 8:00am. The line up includes: Ryan Trapani of the Catskill Forestry Association, Doug Fitzgerald of the Friends of St. Regis group, Ed Engelman of the Rock Rift Fire Tower Committee, Barry Knight from the Knight tower, George Profous, NYSDEC Forester from the Catskill Fire Tower Project, Ray Grimes from the NJ Chapter of the FFLA, and Dan Bubnis of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the FFLA.

Breakfast and Lunch are included.

Saturday afternoon visits to fire towers may include the Knight Tower, Leonard Hill and Utsayantha.

Sunday we may take a trip to one of 5 restored Catskill Fire Towers.

Lodging and restaurant options are numerous and varied. See <http://ffla.org> for links to more information, including a Google map.

Nearby at the Catskill Interpretive Center is the site of a proposed fire tower. Ground breaking may have occurred by the time of the conference.

Early bird special – pre-register and save \$5.00. It helps us with planning and is greatly appreciated. Registration covers the cost of the facility, snacks, and Saturday Breakfast and Lunch.

Cost: \$35.00, or early bird special \$30.00.

For questions or more information, contact Laurie Rankin at [lauriejrankin@gmail.com](mailto:lauriejrankin@gmail.com).

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**REGISTRATION**  
**FFLA NORTHEASTERN CONFERENCE**  
June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>  
Mount Tremper Fire Hall, Ingersol Rd.  
Mount Tremper, NY

Name(s):

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Address:

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City, State, Zip:

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Phone:

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Email:

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**Early Bird Special! Pre-Register by June 1st, save \$5.00.**

Help us with logistical planning! Registration covers the cost of the facility, snacks, as well as Saturday Breakfast and Lunch.

Amount Enclosed (\$30.00 per person until June 1, \$35.00 after) Cash, checks, or Money Order payable to "FFLA", or PayPal to [fflatreas@gmail.com](mailto:fflatreas@gmail.com).

**DISPLAY SPACE:** Models and displays are encouraged! Bring your pictures, books, stories, and wisdom to share!

Return to: Gary Weber, 2590 W Versailles Dr, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815 or email [fflatreas@gmail.com](mailto:fflatreas@gmail.com).

Laurie Rankin, Director  
New York State Chapter  
Forest Fire Lookout Association  
[lauriejrankin@gmail.com](mailto:lauriejrankin@gmail.com) <http://ffla.org>