



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
April 2020**

April is that time of year in New York State when things change and change often. The temperature is nearly 70 degrees one day and it is snowing the next. You might shovel snow or you may mow the lawn. April 2020 may go down in history as the most changeable month ever as we change, adjust, learn, and react to the deadly corona virus. This virus and how we react to it, is literally a matter of life and death. By now, all are aware of the “pause” of NYS that includes many personal pauses from persons being laid off to persons who must self quarantine, children who must now go to school virtually, people who are small business owners who must close their businesses and more. Our “pause” also includes somewhat conflicting information about social distancing and staying at home. While our Governor has encouraged you to stay home, he has also encouraged you to get out and hike locally for exercise. **The NYS DEC ordered all fire towers be closed, though fire tower trails remain open.** And just what is the definition of local? I have heard local means you can walk to it from your front door, within your zip code, within 10 miles, within an hour's drive, nearby.....I think it means be responsible in your choices. Walking out your front door can be a great option for some or it can take you into a crowd of people for others where social distancing would be impossible. I have not been to a fire tower during this time period except to place tower closed signs per DEC instructions and saw no one on the trail that day. I have heard that fire tower trailhead parking lots are full to capacity. A full parking lot most likely means it would be difficult to practice social distancing while hiking. So please be responsible during this time. Do hike locally if it means you can hike responsibly and practice social distancing. Please avoid busy and popular places as much as possible, even if they are a fire tower. Be sure to check to see if the trails are open in your local area before venturing out.

April is also the time of year when Fire Tower Observers were rehired or not. If rehired, they would have to try to reach their assigned tower, sometimes through deep snows, sometimes not. Once at their tower, there were a number of tasks that were required to get things operational for the season. Fred Knauf does a weekly Throw Back Thursday piece on our Facebook page. On March 19th and 26th, he wrote one about the opening of fire towers and the connection to our current situation. A great read and a great reason to join our Facebook page if you have not already done so. Just search FFLA New York State Chapter.

Here is another corona virus connection to forests and possibly fire too:

<https://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/local/environment/2020/03/31/coronavirus-fuels-forestry-florida/5088495002/>

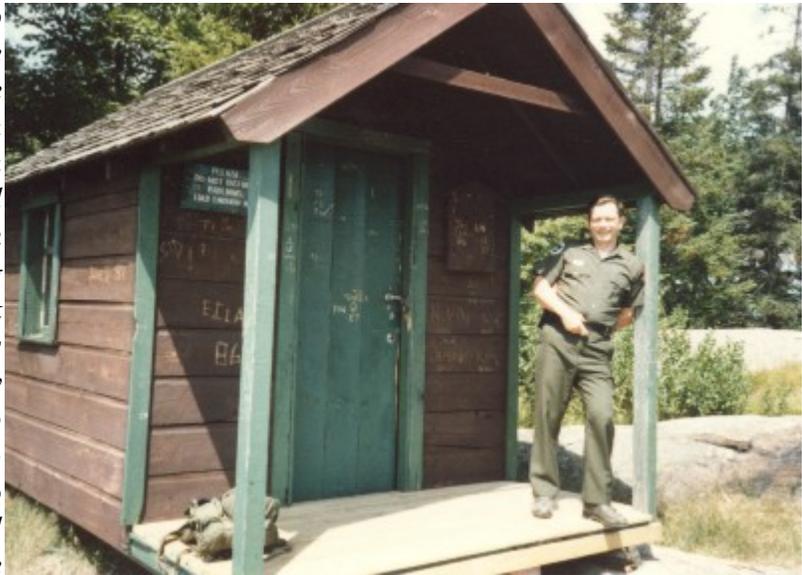
The corona virus is not just limited to NYS of course, but is a nationwide event. In some states spring fire season is upon us. How does the virus affect wildland fire fighting? Here is some information regarding that: <https://www.voanews.com/usa/coronavirus-forces-new-approaches-fighting-wildfires>

Looking ahead to a time when you can travel again, have you considered a lookout rental? Many states offer this wonderful opportunity. Here is a sneak peak of some options you may choose from: <https://vimeo.com/381093028>

Here in the Rankin household, the corona virus has lead to some extra time to devote to fire towers. One of the important things we have tried to do is to ready our NYS Chapter of the FFLA website. A long time ago (my first reference to this was our May 2018 newsletter*) we were generously given the opportunity by Retired Forest Ranger Captain Paul Hartmann to utilize his well prepared fire tower web page as our basis for the Chapter's new web site, <http://nysffla.org>. Paul's tremendous volume of work is still seen in the pages of our new site. We have reviewed and updated Paul's information and added items to the web page. In the past weeks and months, my husband Tom has spent many hours preparing the web site (I have no skills whatsoever for this job) in preparation for its release to all of you. We have tried to incorporate some items we hope you will find useful. Using your browser, you can find information on all the towers. Please navigate around the web site and let us know what you think. We would truly appreciate your comments on this web site, additions you may like to share with us, such as photos, historical articles, etc. you would like us to incorporate. We would also appreciate your feedback in terms of any errors you may find. An example of a photo you can find is this one from the Tomany Fire Tower looking east and down below. The photo, dated 1970, from the Bertha Slade collection, was donated to our chapter through Rick Miller and Mark Haughwout and shows the neat garden rows that Bertha planted at the cabin site. Some perennials continue to bloom at the site. We hope our web site will continue to bloom as well and will be adding to it in the coming months.



- * Quoting from 2018: *Many who came before me have done significant research of the current and former fire towers in New York State. One such person is Retired Forest Ranger Paul Hartmann. Paul has been exceedingly generous in sharing his knowledge of our New York fire towers and system as well as in sharing his photography collection. It is as important to look toward the future as it is to look at and record the past. To that end, Paul's generosity will be showing itself again in the*



near future as he has very kindly given the use of his fire tower web site to the State Chapter as the basis for our web site. We thank Paul for his generous gift and look forward to making some additions to the work he has already done. If you have suggestions for items you would like to see on the web page, please let me know. We will certainly consider including those suggestions as we can and hope to release the new State web page by summer's end at the latest. Photo of Paul Hartmann from 1987, at Bald.

Opportunities are available for Volunteer Stewards at the following fire towers

Mount Tremper: Mount Tremper is seeking a new volunteer Coordinator starting in 2021. If interested, please contact Mark at tremperfiretower01@gmail.com

Sterling: Susan shared she will be looking for volunteers to help out at the Fire tower for the next season. If anyone is interested, please email Susan at sterlingfiretower01@gmail.com.

Stillwater: Stewards are wanted to sign up for weekends from Memorial Day to Columbus Day as NYSDEC reopens fire towers. Contact Laurie if interested lauriejrankin@gmail.com

Need a map? Are there any ADK fire towers out there that need a map? An FFLA member let me know that they have some that would be available for use in a tower. Let me know if interested.

Trivia Answer for March: What mountain is featured in the photo from 1917 that includes both the steel and wooden towers? The correct answer is Blue Mountain Fire Tower! Correct answers were sent in from several people: Jeff W, Paul H, Fred K, Randy Kneer, and Rick M got the correct answer! FFLA Anniversary patches were sent to those that wanted one.

Trivia Question for April: A photo and suggestion submitted by Former Observer Rick Miller was given to me for this month's question. It may require a hint. Oh, I already gave you one! What fire tower is in this aerial view? This month's prize will be a new FFLA 30th anniversary sticker, so you may want to play along!



Ashokan High Point Tower: Determining if there was ever a fire tower on Ashokan High Point in the Catskills is a task that friend John Sasso recently undertook. There are some old photographs in circulation that are labeled High Point.

Many have thought the photo was taken at Ashokan High Point in the Catskills. Many have thought the photo was from High Point in the Shawangunks. Both peaks clearly had towers on their summits, but were they both Fire Towers? John went digging for the answers. http://catskill-3500-club.org/canister/TheCatskillCanister_2020_v53-2_Spring.pdf

Stewardship Appreciation Award Nominations: From the NYSDEC announcements:

“The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is now accepting nominations for the inaugural 2020 Stewardship Appreciation Awards, DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos announced today. “Partnerships are invaluable to DEC's efforts to promote outdoor recreation and provide a positive visitor experience, said Commissioner Seggos.” This new awards program will recognize the efforts of volunteers and partners in improvement, outreach, and stewardship projects on state lands, waters, and at DEC facilities.

Nominees must have one of the following formal agreements with DEC:

- *An active Volunteer Stewardship Agreement (VSA);*
- *A current Memorandum of Understanding;*
- *A current Use and Occupancy Agreement; or*

- *Proof of organized volunteer activities on State lands.*

Completed nominations for the 2020 awards must be submitted by Thursday, April 30. Award winners will be announced in September. Additional information about the award program, including a 2020 nomination form, can be found on DEC's [website](#). Nomination forms can also be requested via email to adventureny@dec.ny.gov, or by writing to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, Adventure NY, 625 Broadway, 14th Floor, Albany, New York 12233-1010.”

Nominations are being accepted through April 30th. Please nominate your favorite organization.

Burn Ban: The NYS Burn Ban remains in effect through May 14th. Please respect this ban.

I loved this video about Idaho lookouts. This really captures why we love fire towers and why the FFLA was founded. You may see a few familiar faces too. <https://www.pbs.org/video/outdoor-idaho-eyes-of-the-forest-idahos-fire-lookouts-1/>

Why was the FFLA founded? Our April guest columnist Fred Knauf gives you insight into this question: “Thirty years ago this month marks a special date & time, as this month is the first publication date of the “*Lookout Network*” magazine. I’m one of the lucky ones to have an original. 14-pages of information from the various State’s submitters, and in looking back at it from our eyes of identity theft, it is a little scary what we all placed in there. But the 1990’s were nothing like the 1960’s, and so are nothing like today in terms of evil people who would use your address, names, signatures etc. Such are the times.

That “magazine”, if you will, was nothing more than a 14-page, photo-copied & stapled hand-out. The group that was to become the Forest Fire Lookout Association was underway and initial responsibilities passed out for state representatives to gather information on the present fire towers in their State, become a filter for requests, (thereby reducing the burden on State officials), and begin to create a buzz about fire towers. This was especially important in areas where towers were just closed or plans were in the making for the closure at the end of the 1990 fire season, such as NY. It was hoped that our group could follow that of “The Lighthouse Society” and get people and Departments thinking about the historical aspects of the towers still standing and a consideration for the potential in other uses for public observation & hiking destinations, before all of them were gone. At that time, NY manned only five towers, down from 26 that were used in 1988 ... towers atop St. Regis, Blue, Hadley, Rondaxe and Red Hill.

Our State had a few advantages over another northern State who both began fire towers around the same time and closed them the same year...the State of Maine. New York’s towers were almost entirely Aeromotor & International Derrick fire towers, which featured strong steel structures, solid means of footing, and very safe stair and landing accesses to the tower’s cab. Maine, on the other hand, employed much cheaper and locally manufactured steel towers that did not have solid cross-braces, used a wooden cab that extended the steel structure, and employed a nearly vertical ladder system to access that cab. That dreaded word, liability, was paramount in Maine’s decision to topple and remove so many towers in their State, while in the same 30 years, only a handful of towers have met that demise in New York via the DEC (McCarty Hill, Ingram Hill, & Petersburg are the only three that come to mind). Credit for that needs to be handed out to each Region’s Captains like Paul Hartman, Don Seacord, George Ezzo, Ray Wood and others, and to those “tower friendly” at the central offices... Lou Curth and Ed Jacoby come to mind.

One Forest Ranger stuck his neck out in 1991 to keep his beloved tower and began working in earnest with locals to form a committee to save that tower. He was Greg George. Whether he had influence from initial FFLA conference attendee Larry Paul, who may have told him about the fledgling group that would become the FFLA is not documented. Larry began volunteering as a summit steward at Blue Mountain fire tower in the fall of 1991, worked out by Greg. So, Kudos to Greg for all that work back then.

But I digress from that initial “*Lookout Network*”. Most of the magazine featured copies of letters received from the various state representatives on the status of fire tower use, number standing, and future. There was one photocopied image of the Wellfleet tower in Massachusetts, which still stands today, and a nice article from Tim Sullivan on the fire towers of Harriman State Park. Though not in the newsletter, the second meeting of the group was planned for Saddle River, New Jersey, in August 1990. If you haven’t seen those early issues, I believe they are available electronically, scanned through the National Organization.”
Fred Knauf

Calendar

Saturday and Sunday May 2nd and 3rd : Observer's Cabin work at Blue Mt.

Saturday and Sunday May 9th and 10th: Observer's Cabin work at Blue Mt.

Saturday or Sunday June 13th and 14th: Trail work at Lyon Mt

Tuesday, June 23rd 7:00pm: Marty Podskoch, Laurie Rankin and the Friends of Bramley Mt Fire Tower presentation at the Canon Free Library in Delhi.

Saturday and Sunday July 11th and 12th: Vandewhacker Observer's cabin work with ADK 46ers*

Saturday and Sunday July 25th and 26th: Vandewhacker Observer's cabin work with ADK 46ers*

Saturday and Sunday July 25th and 26th: Fire Tower work at Pillsbury

Saturday and Sunday August 1st and 2nd: Fire Tower work at Pillsbury

Saturday and Sunday August 1st and 2nd: Trail work at Poke O Moonshine with ADK 46ers*

Saturday and Sunday August 8th and 9th: Vandewhacker Observer's cabin work with ADK 46ers*

Saturday and Sunday August 8th and 9th: Fire Tower work at Pillsbury

Thursday, September 3rd 6-8:00 p.m., at the Adirondack History Museum in Elizabethtown, Marty Podskoch will present about Adirondack Fire Towers and highlight Kempshall and West. They will do a reception with BBQ, maybe another special fire tower brew, and fire tower cake.

Saturday or Sunday September 19th and 20th: Trail work at Lyon Mt.

Saturday and Sunday October 3rd and 4th: Kane Observer's cabin work.

***with ADK 46ers work, you can sign up on their web page and you do not have to be a 46er to participate: <http://www.adk46er.org/trail-crew.html>**

*****Note all scheduled dates are subject to cancellation or postponement*****

Currently our orders to “pause” continue through April 30th. For now we are going to keep our fire tower work schedule and presentations on track, knowing that it is likely we will be canceling some events. All rescheduled dates will be announced. Please check the schedule to see if you can help us out on some of the dates that are posted. We are not likely to get a long lead time on when fire towers reopen so it would be very helpful if we have people to call on to help us out when the time comes.

I close this month of April's newsletter as I began it, talking about the changes we see in NYS in April. One change I always see in April are the daffodils. These bulbs always come up irregardless of the weather. It often seems the bright yellow blossoms get snow flakes or in some cases several inches of snow on them. But while the daffodils may bow their heads when covered with snow, they will recover and stand tall and bright, a beacon of hope that life will go on. I hope your life will be like the daffodils and while occasionally weighted down, will stand tall and bright again soon. Be calm, be kind, be well.

Laurie Rankin, Director
NYS Chapter
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www.ffla.org

