



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



Happy August everyone! I hope all of you were spared any significant damage from Hurricane/Tropical Storm Isaias? Some in NYS were lucky enough to receive some much needed rain from this storm, some too much and some very little, keeping some areas still quite dry. Two wildfires were reported in St. Lawrence County in late July. To keep an eye on drought conditions you can reference this page: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/68329.html>

The Facebook photo contest continues to have a large number of entries which we are thankful for and have enjoyed immensely. The winner this month was Doug Fitz who shared this photo taken by Janelle Hoh, of the St. Regis Fire Tower during our 2019 Lighting of the Tower event. Thanks for playing along and congratulations on the win! Your photo is not only here, but is also our Facebook cover photo for the next month.

Despite tropical storms and hurricanes, Covid-19 still rules our world. We continue to have fairly quiet virus numbers throughout the state, but we are certainly seeing some localized areas of infection too. Tom and I have taken the opportunity to do some traveling around the state to visit fire towers. We visited Balsam Lake, Hunter, Hurricane, Gore, Woodhull, Stillwater, Lyon and Poke O Moonshine recently. We were pleased to see many visitors out on the trails, some much more well prepared than others. Most seemed to be very aware of the request to socially distance as you can by stepping off trail when possible. If not, most were donning masks as we passed on more narrow sections of the trail. Stepping off trail comes with its own concerns as some trails are really getting much wider where many are passing. If you can, please consider stepping aside on a durable surfaces only.

The NYSDEC continues to recommend that people go outdoors and recreate where one is less likely to be in close contact with others. Unfortunately, this recommendation and people feeling very isolated has led to an amazing increase in outdoor recreational users, particularly ones with little experience. At the same time, NYSDEC had a budgetary freeze in place that included no monies for fire tower stewards this year. A few groups found enough monies in their budgets or raised enough money to hire a steward. Some groups utilized volunteers as they were able to, to have a presence at the towers. Of course, at the towers is not the same as in the towers. The inside of a small 7 x 7 cab with all the windows closed is really a giant Petri dish during Covid-19 times, so all stewards, paid or volunteer are being asked to stay on the ground to greet visitors rather than in the cab. We thank all the stewards who are participating during these unusual times! Additionally, all visitors are asked to be on the fire towers with their family groups only, to wear a mask, and to use hand sanitizer before and after being on the tower.

I can't help but think if all of the thousands of visitors who are coming to fire towers in NYS for the first time were to be met by an Observer, how wonderful it would be for them and for the great outdoors. One of the most important jobs that a Fire Tower Observer had was engaging visitors in what was called "public relations" at the time. It was a part of the job that many Observers enjoyed.

From the “Fire Tower Forever” article published in Adirondack Life the summer of 1974 we find an inset by Clyde H. Smith about this very thing. “A Point of Agreement - The educational aspect of the fire tower”

*“When I was a youngster I had the privilege of growing up on top of a mountain where my father was a fire lookout. We lived on the mountain for nine seasons, and my unique experience gave me a special insight to the complexities of many of Nature's secrets. One of the things I remember most (and looked forward to as a growing boy) was the hundreds of hikers that visited the mountain top each summer.*

*People of all ages would venture up the trails, sometimes in swarms, sometimes in tiny family groups, and often solo climbers. The focal point for everyone was the lookout tower where they could register their names, visit with -my father, and ask questions. Included among the hikers were many boys' and girls' camps - kids from the cities, many climbing their very first mountain” and you can imagine the questions' they had on their mind. And here was my father, first priority, guardian of the forest, but second, and probably even more significant, public relations expert and sole representative of the conservation institution. The people who went away from that mountain went with a greater understanding of the system and a genuine respect for our forests and parks. And the young campers took back a unique gift – a deep appreciation for the values nature has provided - all because a single man was there to answer their inquisitive questions.”*

Perhaps we all need to try to find ways to engage these new visitors to the outdoors, to encourage these visitors to understand and love our fire towers and open spaces. They are the future caretakers and we must make every effort to gather their support.

### **7<sup>th</sup> Annual Lighting of the Fire Towers**

The 7th annual lighting event is the perfect social distancing event with all the guidelines posted on our web site as well as the press release that you can use to connect with your local community through radio, newspapers, and posters. Remember, this is NOT a hiking event. We do have an August 25<sup>th</sup> sign up deadline so we can make sure everyone locally knows what your plans are and they can be reminded to look up and remember the history of our fire towers. <http://nysffla.org/light.html>

In 2019, Fred Knauf participated in the Lighting event and he shares his experience and a few photos here with all of you. Thanks so much for sharing Fred! Perhaps YOU would like to join us in 2020?

*“August 31, 2019, I had the opportunity to be a part of the 6<sup>th</sup> annual Lighting of the Fire Towers. This Labor Day Weekend activity began in the southern Catskill Mountains at Red Hill, as a means of showing that the fire towers, when they were used, were the forest's beacons protecting our lands from the ravages of large-scale fires, much like the lighthouses have been for shipping. The lighting was to take place between 9 and 9:30 pm. Snowy Mountain is located about halfway between Speculator and Indian Lake, on the west side of Indian Lake. It is the tallest mountain in the Adirondacks outside of the High Peaks region with a summit of 3,904 ft. The trail is about 3.7 miles and climbs from 1800 ft. at the start with most of the elevation gain near the end.*

*I signed up to light the Snowy Mt. tower, and in the last few weeks completed my plan on how I would light it and get up and down safely. Snowy's trail features thirteen stream crossings and the last mile is about as steep as any trail in the state rising about 1600 feet. Due to the steepness and loose scree in the steep section, I chose to stay atop the summit overnight using “no impact” camping. A tarp set up tied to trees and my plastic, ground-mat and sleeping bag on the rock under the tarp would insure no damage to the plants and fragile vegetation.*



*I departed for the mountains mid-morning with my Kelty frame pack and enough gear to survive a freezing night, rain (though not in the forecast), two days of food and water, and four Warsun 1200 LED work lights. Snowy would be one of 20 fire towers that had signed on through the NYS Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association, a group I helped start, and now a group that actually helps maintain the towers for the public. I had stopped in Speculator for a sub sandwich for dinner along with a few other items. I carried around 2 gallons of water as I knew water would be non-existent at the summit.*

*The trek is really a great trail, even with a large frame pack, until you reach that last mile. It took a little over 3 hours to summit as many of those coming down were asking me where I was going and what I was doing. Some were camping at Lewey Lake State Campground and were excited that they would be able to see the lighting of the tower. The one thing I can say is that my frame pack may be the same as it was 17 years ago when I last backpacked with it, but my frame certainly isn't the same! Wow.*

*The view from the tower did not disappoint and my <http://caltopo.com> "View From Here" prints of the mountains did aid in confirming the viewing distance at over 100 miles that evening. It was so clear that with my 7x35 binoculars, I could see the windmills atop the northern Tug Hill, Gomer Hill's fire tower (55 miles distant), the rocky definition of the summit of Whiteface Mtn. (52 miles), the cone of Camel's Hump in Vt. (85 miles), Mass. highest point, Mt. Greylock (96 miles), and even the three summit Blackhead range of the NE Catskills (100 miles). I could see other distant hills heading down the Hudson River Valley further, but could not make out any distinguishing things.*

*I ate my meal in the tower cab watching the shadows of the mountain range which included Snowy creep across the mountains to the east of Indian Lake. A magnificent sunset followed by a helpful twilight ensued, so that I could string up my lights. I used my hiking rope to string up from the old window screw holes at the top of the windows such that they would all come to a center point where I could then mount the four lights and used two ropes each to support the lights and keep them from shifting in the wind. Duct tape kept each on the rope. As it became dark, I began watching for other lights on near towers and saw retired Ranger Gary Lee and FFLA member Jim Fox as they headed up the eastern trail of Woodhull Mtn. At 8:45 pm, I decided to light up, as I saw Woodhull's tower lighting and I said, "what the heck, it was dark enough." To light up those 4800 lumens, I had to put on the sunglasses!*

*After lighting, I sat just below the cab and looking north towards Newcomb, either the town or Lake Harris Campground had a wonderful firework display that I could see but could not hear. The stars were magnificent as the skies had turned mostly clear. I went down the tower to try to take long exposure tripod images of the tower & stars, but after three exposures, my film camera's battery died and I forgot to pack a second battery. I shot a few digital images, but was not successful at getting my*

*digital camera programmed for a 10 or 20 second exposure. I went back up to just underneath the lit cab to look for other tower's lights. I could see (mostly with binoculars) Arab, Blue, Goodnow, Woodhull and Hadley Mtns towers lit up. Owls Head seemed lit, but that may have been people on Castle Rock by Blue Mtn Lake (same line of sight). I also saw a light way SSW which I believe was Mt Utsayantha down by Stamford, NY. Sadly, I could not see Hunter Mtn's tower over the top of Hamilton Mtn., and Bald and Stillwater's lights were blocked by Cellar and Wakely Mtns, as were four other towers in the northern Adirondacks that were lit. At 9:30, I promptly turned off the lights and in five minutes had the contraption down. I watched as other tower's lights were extinguished and that was the only real time I felt lonely. I then took a while to look down at the flickering fires at the fifteen or so campsites along Indian Lake and those in Lewey Lake campground. I celebrated by eating my desert, a Milky Way candy bar underneath a brilliant Milky Way!*

*Sunday morning, I was up early enough to have everything packed away before sunrise, complete some summit clean-up of litter, glass, etc. that I stowed out, and then watched another amazing sunrise from a mountain fire tower; only a few weeks after one on Bald Mtn. The hike down was slow but safe, and a stop at the Eagle Bay donut shop for a coffee and a dozen donuts capped off the experience that I will never forget. If you live near a tower that is not being lit, might I suggest you volunteer to light that tower. When it is through, you will be glad you did!" (All photos are from Fred)*



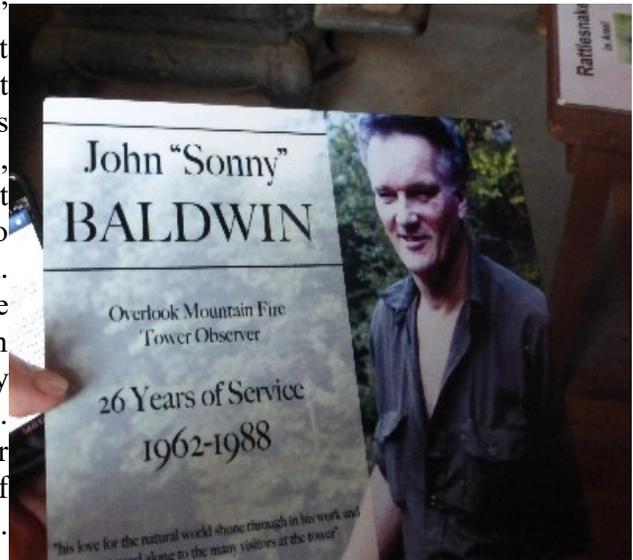
### **News from Around the Country**

Unfortunately Covid-19 has found another victim, our FFLA Western Conference. I was really looking forward to this one in the pacific northwest where the organization would celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, then came Covid. Let us hope that next September will bring us another great option and that some of you will plan to attend.

The link below is a thought provoking article about what may be our future as it relates to wildfires. I couldn't help but wonder, could it happen here? Our Forever Wild Forest Preserve sure has a significant fuel load. Additionally, many of the reforestation projects completed by the CCC in the 1940's are now reaching the end of their life span. Many of the plantations of spruce that were planted are staring to naturally die. They could leave large swaths of standing dead trees. Add drought conditions to it and we could be in trouble. <https://www.summitdaily.com/news/playing-with-fire-how-a-history-of-mining-suppression-and-climate-change-has-fueled-a-new-generation-of-wildfires/>

## In Memoriam

Longtime Fire Tower Observer, John “Sonny” Baldwin passed away in July. Serving for 26 years at Overlook fire tower, Sonny was perhaps known best for his interesting relationship with the rattlesnakes that made Overlook their home. While others, including his father who was the Observer at Mount Tremper may not have liked the snakes, Sonny had no fear of them and one could often be found near him. When not hanging out with the snakes, Sonny could be found in the fire tower cab, looking for smoke, often having gotten there by the rather unconventional way of climbing the outside girders rather than the stairs. He loved sharing stories with visitors to the fire tower and he was always sure to set those visitors straight if they did something like drop litter along the trail. Sonny will be missed by many.



### [Sonny's Obituary](#)

## News from Around the State

**Whitney Estate for Sale:** Have a \$180 million lying around you can spend? <https://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/news/local-news/2020/07/whitney-park-listed-for-180m/> These lands include a fire tower that was in place to protect the estates, Salmon Lake Fire Tower. What do you think?



**Would you like to own a fire tower?** Contractor Mike Vilegi may have just the answer for you. Mike has made some Cedar Fire Tower kits. “Possess your own piece of Adirondack history. Our all-cedar timber frame fire towers are based on the design used to locate fires in the Adirondacks for decades. Sit sixteen feet above the ground on sturdy 8” x 8” legs while admiring the beauty all around. We procure all white cedar locally and carefully mill each timber. Each fire tower is built as a kit. This means material for the legs, braces, posts, flooring, and roofing (except shingles) is included, along with the fasteners needed. A 7 foot square cabin is the standard model with options to enlarge the cabin and add a wrap around deck available. Please contact Mike at 1(518) 524-6891 or [thruwood@gmail.com](mailto:thruwood@gmail.com) with any questions.”

**Goodnow Fire Tower:** SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) operates the Goodnow Mountain Fire Tower. The tower is closest to the center of the Adirondack park. Located on a biological research station, the fire tower is open to the public for hiking and sightseeing. The tower supports research and education as well as recreation and is an important feature in the region. The Fire Tower, is in serious need of repair. ESF has begun an initiative to repair the damaged roof on the almost 100-year-old tower located on the college's Newcomb Campus. At present, the tower stairs are open for climbing but the cabin at top is locked. We invite you to join in supporting this project. Details about the tower project and donation information are here: <https://www.esf.edu/newcomb/firetower/>

**Cathedral Rock Fire Tower Closed:** The Ranger School's James F. Dubuar Memorial Forest will be closed to the public for an indefinite amount of time beginning Saturday, August 15, 2020. Public access to the Cathedral Rock Fire Tower will be affected by this closure. This action is necessary to protect students and staff as they begin a new academic year in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The school apologizes for any inconvenience this may cause, but it is a critical precaution as the school works to ensure the health and success of the Class of 2021.

**Friends of Hurricane Fire Tower:** A new panorama was made and carried up to the mountain in late July. However, the plan to attach the panorama did not work. With no hardware store within sight, the crew had to carry the pano back down. This is one of the unique aspects of being part of a group that volunteers on a mountaintop with the only access being a trail. Thanks for all the effort! We know it will be worth it in the end. Stay tuned for photos of the finished product.

**Cathead Fire Tower:** Did you write that letter in support of reopening the Cathead fire tower to the public? I sure hope so. Not a great letter writer? Simply go to our web site and use the outline we have already provided for you, add your personal touch and mail it! Let your voice be heard!  
<http://nysffla.org/>

**Postcard Collection Donation:** We are extremely grateful to Retired Forest Ranger, Captain Paul Hartmann for his recent donation of his postcard collection to the NYS FFLA. We found some wonderful, unique postcards contained in this collection and we have begun scanning them so that we can share them with all of you.

**What can you do to help our chapter?** You can simply become a member or consider renewing your membership. We can also use people who are simply interested in fire towers who can help gather history, work on fire towers, assist behind the scenes with things like this newsletter or anything else you can think of. Whatever it may be, you have a strength that we would welcome. Thanks for considering. <http://ffla.org/index.html>

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