



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



The July photo contest on our Facebook page was a tie! We had to have a tie breaker and Debi Tebano's photo from the Kane Fire Tower cab was the final winner. Debi's photo graces this newsletter and our Facebook page for the next month. Thank you Debi and all others who participated!

NYSDEC-controlled fire towers were reopened to visitors in the past month with the exception of Sugar Hill. NYS DEC includes the following direction to visitors: “only one household group should be in the fire tower cab at a time, groups should practice social distance on the summit while waiting to climb to the cab, sanitize hands before and after being on the fire tower, and wear masks”. In addition they clearly state that the surfaces of the fire tower and cabs have not been cleaned. All of these directives were sort of buried in a press release that focused on campgrounds on June 26th. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/press/120737.html>

Fire Tower Stewards had little notice of the reopening and have been given direction that they should remain on the ground when visitors are on the tower. Past funding for stewards is not available this year. Some towers have placed volunteer stewards (Hunter and Overlook) and a couple have been able to fund paid stewards (Poke O Moonshine has Ivy Cerro on duty and Hurricane has Ethan Raines on duty). Other groups are trying to open with volunteers, but the openings may be delayed until such time as there are either enough volunteers or enough Personal Protective Equipment available for the stewards.

From the Forest Ranger highlights report, it has been a very busy month for wildfires in NYS. As of this writing, the fire danger map only shows a moderate concern in the majority of the state, but rainfall has been spotty. Isolated areas of the state are very dry and they have been keeping our Forest Rangers busy.

6-17 Town of Hunter, Greene County, Kaaterskill Wild Forest, Wildland Fire: On June 10 at 1:30 p.m., Greene County 911 contacted DEC's Central Dispatch requesting Forest Ranger assistance with a wildfire in Kaaterskill Clove off Route 23A. Two Forest Rangers responded and arrived on scene at approximately 1:50 p.m. The wildfire was suppressed by members of the Haines Falls, Tannersville, and Hunter fire departments. The total estimated size of the fire was .3 acres; the fire may have been caused by a lit cigarette being thrown into the woods from a motor vehicle.

Town of Helena, St. Lawrence County, Wildland Fire: On June 11 at 11:00 a.m., Forest Rangers were called regarding a possible wildland fire near the town of Helena. The fire was located by responding fire departments off County Route 53 in the Brasher State Forest approximately one mile off the road along the bank of the St. Regis River. The intensity of the fire increased due to dry fuels and steady 15-20 mph winds. ATVs, small brush trucks, and two pumps were utilized by five fire departments and Forest Rangers to suppress the .75-acre fire.

Town of Ellenburg, Clinton County, Wildland Fire: On June 13 at 1:35 p.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from Clinton County 911 reporting a wildland fire in a remote swampy area in Ellenburg Center. Forest Rangers Jared Booth and Tom Gliddi responded to assist the Ellenburg Center, Ellenburg Depot, Churubusco, Lyon Mountain, Altona, Mooers, and Champlain fire departments with suppression efforts. Ranger Booth advised that the fire was contained at approximately eight acres and would be placed in patrol status until completely extinguished.

6-25:St. Lawrence County, Wildland Fire: On June 15, Region 6 Forest Rangers responded to a wildland fire in the town of Norfolk. The homeowner was burning brush the previous day and thought the fire was out. Aided by light winds, near drought conditions, and fuel, the fire quickly burned roughly one-half acre before several local fire departments and Forest Rangers got the fire under control. Rangers put out hotspots and secured a fire line around it. The fire was completely out by the next day.

Warren County, Wildland Fire: On June 17 at 2 p.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from Warren County 911 requesting Forest Ranger assistance with a wildfire in the town of Thurman. Forest Rangers Chuck Kabrehl and Art Perryman responded and assisted Thurman and Warrensburg fire departments with the fire that was threatening a structure on Dippikill Road. An investigation determined that the fire was likely caused by an electric line that ran from a home to a barn on the property. Rangers assisted in putting the fire out quickly.

Albany County, Wildland Fire: On June 20 at 3:15 p.m., the Albany County Sheriff's Office requested Forest Ranger assistance with a brush fire at Cole Hill State Forest. Three Forest Rangers arrived on scene along with the Berne and East Berne volunteer fire departments. Together, the responders suppressed the remaining hot spots. The fire was determined to be 0.8 acres in size and declared out by 7:15 p.m.

St. Lawrence County, Wildland Fire: On June 20 at 9:40 p.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from St. Lawrence County 911 requesting Forest Ranger assistance with a fire in the town of Brasher. Forest Rangers, along with the Brasher-Winthrop and Helena fire departments, worked on the fire believed to have been caused by a bonfire on private land that spread into the Brasher State Forest. Rangers declared the 1.3-acre fire out on June 22, 2020.

6-30: St. Lawrence County, Wildland Fire: On June 22 at 4:45 p.m., Region 6 Forest Rangers received reports of a wildland forest fire near Chub Lake. Two Forest Rangers arrived at 6 p.m. to find approximately 4.5 acres of active flames and a widespread ground fire. With darkness approaching, Forest Rangers ordered resources for the next day. On the morning of June 23, the fire grew to five acres. Rangers constructed a fire line around the perimeter to prevent further growth and constructed a hose lay with laterals to suppress the fire. On June 24, Rangers suppressed hot spots to eliminate any remaining ground fire. The fire remains in patrol status.

Town of Webb, Herkimer County, Wildland Fire: On June 24 at 1:40 p.m., Herkimer County 911 contacted DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch requesting assistance with a backcountry wildfire on Panther Mountain. Four Forest Rangers responded to assist the Old Forge Fire Department with a one-acre smoldering wildfire in the cliffs and rocks at the Panther Mountain overlook, burning in deep spruce duff 0.6 miles from a private road. Volunteer firefighters and Rangers knocked down the fire. Over the following three days, seven Rangers utilized a State Police Aviation helicopter with water bucket drops, hand tools, and set up a half-mile water hose pumping operation up 600 vertical feet in elevation to continually douse several areas of the fire with water. The fire is now in patrol status.

7-15: Franklin and Essex Counties, Wilderness Fire Suppression and Rescue: On July 10 at 9:50 a.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from a hiker reporting a fire on the summit of Mount Emmons in the High Peaks Wilderness Area, town of Harrietstown, Franklin County. Due to the long approach over difficult terrain, New York State Police (NYSP) Aviation assisted by inserting two Forest Rangers via a hoist. Forest Rangers Kevin Burns and Scott van Laer conducted a size-up of the small ground fire, extinguished it, and placed it in patrol status. While preparing for the mission, Dispatch received a call at 10:50 a.m. from ADK's Johns Brook Lodge reporting a hiker suffering from a heat-related illness in the High Peaks Wilderness Area, town of Keene, Essex County. The 27-year-old male hiker from Phelps was dehydrated and unable to adequately rehydrate. Forest Ranger Benjamin Baldwin responded with NYSP Aviation to pick up the hiker at the Johns Brook outpost landing zone and airlift him to a local hospital. At 12:46 p.m., after the hiker was dropped off for additional medical attention, the helicopter and Ranger/Crew Chief returned to the fire on Mount Emmons to assist with suppression efforts

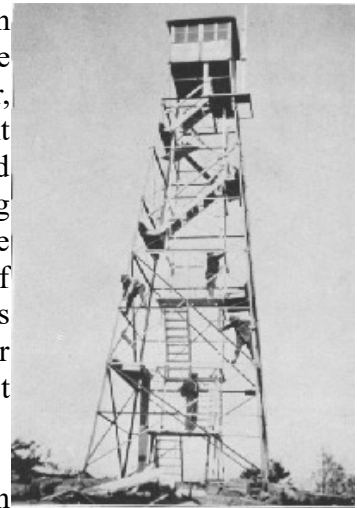
In addition, we had two wilderness rescues on fire tower peaks this past month as reported in the Ranger Report:

Town of Dresden, Washington County, Wilderness Rescue: On July 12 at 10:34 a.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from Essex County 911 reporting an injured hiker with a foot laceration on the summit of Black Mountain. Forest Rangers Callee Baker, Evan Donegan, Joe Hess, and Brandon Poulton responded to assist. Rangers located the 29-year-old injured hiker from Castleton-on-Hudson just below the summit. Prior to the Rangers' arrival, a member of the hiking party with backcountry medical training bandaged the injury. Rangers slowly walked the hiker down the mountain before reaching an ATV staged partway up the trail to transport him out of the woods.

Town of Webb, Herkimer County, Wilderness Rescue: On June 19 at 4:58 p.m., Forest Ranger Dylan McCartney overheard radio traffic on the Herkimer County Sheriff's frequency of an injured 19-year-old hiker from Winslow, New Jersey, near the summit of Bald Mountain. Forest Rangers McCartney and Lincoln Hanna responded to the area, arriving at 5:25 p.m. The Rangers located the hiker and determined she had a non-weight bearing ankle injury. With assistance from the Old Forge Fire Department, Rangers McCartney and Hanna carried the hiker out from the Bald Mountain Fire Tower and down the mountain using carry out and low-angle rope techniques. Forest Rangers and fire department personnel reached the trailhead at 6:45 p.m., where the hiker was turned over to the Old Forge Ambulance and transported to a local hospital for treatment.

Can you imagine how busy our fire towers would have been if they were manned by Observers during this past month? Can you imagine if there was no communication available for these emergency situations? Let's consider one fire tower in particular, Cathead Mountain Fire Tower. The current steel tower was erected in 1916, replacing a wooden one that had been used since 1910. The Aeromotor LL25 was retrofitted with interior stairs in 1929. The fire tower remained in service through 1988, officially closing in 1989. This fire tower is located in Hamilton County, but has been off limits to the public for many years. The reason for the closure was based on a dispute between a landowner and NYS. Yet, the area desperately needed some emergency communications, so an additional tower frame was added over the original Aeromotor tower to hold communications equipment. Access to this equipment was and still is by helicopter only. The equipment is powered by means of solar panels and a small wind generator on site. All maintenance is done by helicopter. And there are still "dead zones" in the area where our emergency responders have no service what so ever!

To alleviate the emergency communication concern, many steps have been taken behind the scenes to try to come up with a solution. Perhaps the greatest amount of work has gone on behind the scenes with Bill Farber, Chairman of the Hamilton County Board of Supervisors, and the current landowners. Make no mistake, this is a very complicated issue. Indeed there are many layers to this compromise. Benefits include having emergency communication with a great deal more coverage than there currently is, public access to the fire tower once again, and the addition of nearly 500 acres of state land. Is it perfect? Probably not. But it is progress and well informed progress rather than the stale mate that has gone on for many, many years with no forward progress. To learn more, I suggest reading some of the links below. Photo to the right is from 1929.



Compromise is vitally important to make forward progress. Let us all reach out to our local legislators and ask for their support for this well done compromise. You can also share comments with Bill Farber, Chairman Hamilton County Board of Supervisors PO Box 205 Lake Pleasant, NY 12108. With enough support and an understanding of what it means to be a good neighbor, to protect our communities and the surrounding forests, to protect our first responders, and to once again allow access to this historic fire tower this compromise can be enacted! We have a sample letter you can use on our web page should you choose www.nysffla.org/catheadletter.odt



6-22-20: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2020/07/nyco-amendment.html>

6-27-20: <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/hamilton-county-constitutional-amendment>

7-2-20: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2020/07/cathead-mountain-amendment-would-be-complicated-and-difficult.html#comments>

7-6-20: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2020/06/debate-over-amendments-to-article-14-in-the-nys-constitution-in-2020.html>

Other News

Vandalism at Catskill Fire Towers: Sometime during the closure of the fire towers vandalism occurred at both Overlook and Tremper Mountain Fire Towers. Overlook had a locked gate at the top of the initial set of stairs on the fire tower. Vandals took it upon themselves to break this gate. Additionally, other vandals broke into the locked cab at Mount Tremper fire tower.

Stillwater Fire Tower is still looking for volunteer stewards. If interested, please let me know.



7th Annual Lighting of the Fire Towers

The perfect local, social distancing event! This event is truly a great opportunity for you to promote fire towers and their special connection to the community. This event is the brain child of Doug Hamilton of the Red Hill Fire Tower Committee. The idea is to light the fire tower with a high powered light on a specific date, put lots of press releases in the local paper about the time when this would occur and invite people to go to locations around the community where they could look up, see the light on the horizon and remember that there was a fire tower there watching over and protecting the community and surrounding forest. This year the event will occur on Saturday, September 5th from 9:00pm to 9:30 pm. Rain date will be Sunday, September 6th at the same times.

This event will occur under the following these guidelines:

- a- Remember this is NOT a hiking event so this is perfect for social distancing. It is a fire tower promotional event.
- b- Please reach out to your local newspapers with locations that the fire tower will be visible from. Encourage people to drive or hike to those locations while maintaining social distancing and look up at 9:00pm to see that strange light shining! We can help you with the viewing sights by utilizing <http://www.nysffla.org/light.html>. We will have these links on our web page as well as a sample press release. www.nysffla.org/lightpress.odt.
- c- Choose a fire tower you would like to light and coordinate with the local group there. If you are in doubt about who to contact, let me know and I will point you to the right person(s).
- d – Let me know of your participation so it can be publicized.
- e- Choose your Illuminator and the type of light you will use.
- f– Choose one or two persons who will accompany the Illuminator for safety purposes and be certain the group is willing to either practice social distancing, belongs to the same family group, or wears a mask when not 6 feet apart for the hike and the event. Additionally, please make sure everyone has the proper gear for a night hike including enough head lamps.
- g- Please light the lamp for the specified period of 9:00pm to 9:30 pm.
- h- Due to Covid 19, we recommend that all wear a mask while on the tower, practice social distancing and sanitize well before and after being on the tower. You can light the light from the upper landing if you feel more comfortable doing so.
- i – Deadline for participation is 10 days prior to the event – August 25th - so that press releases can go out. No tower will be accepted for participation after August 25th.
- j- Please report back to me after the lighting event so we know that all are off the mountain safely and please consider sharing pictures with us too!

Other states are looking for reliable fire spotting and returning to our roots to do so:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03rvlPNQPAA&feature=share>

SUNY ESF has a new leader: <https://www.esf.edu/communications/view2.asp?newsID=8717#.XvJV7HhOfpY.facebook>

Poke-O-Moonshine trail work will happen on August 5th at 9:30 am on the Observer's trail one mile south of the campground. You must preregister to assist: <https://www.pokeomoonshine.org/events>

From our friends at National Woodlands Word Wednesday article, an interesting perspective on fire prevention: https://tucson.com/news/local/photos-logging-operation-on-mt-graham-improves-wildlife-habitat-reduces-fire-danger/collection_9b82f638-bbdd-11ea-9750-a7be1116b03e.html#1

July 15, 2020 was the 25th Anniversary of the derrecho that roared through the Adirondacks. A wonderful first hand account of the events, complete with photos was written by Michael Bushey on the History and Legends of the Adirondacks Facebook page. The comments are fascinating to read and we thank this group for publishing such a great account of this moment in history.
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/adirondackhistory/permalink/1348216678703764/>

And finally – have you all had a chance to see the comet, NEOWISE? The comet has been very bright and has a long tail. We have some great fire tower photos on our Facebook page of the comet.

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association
www.ffla.org