



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



Fall is right around the corner, but fall fire season is upon us! Here in NYS the streams are exceptionally low, there is very little if any rain in the forecast and we have wind too. One fairly significant fire broke out this month near New Paltz: The Cragwood Fire occurred in an area with steep and rocky terrain and winds hampered efforts as well. [News Article](#). We have seen overcast skies due to smoke from western fires, but truthfully they have resulted in some incredible sunrises and sunsets here.

We are much more fortunate than the western United States where wildfires have been raging for weeks. Many have died, many homes and businesses have been lost and many continue to be on the front lines trying desperately to make some forward progress. NYS has sent some Forest Rangers to assist, but due to Covid-19 guidelines our numbers are lower than the normal response. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-welcomes-team-new-york-wildland-firefighters-home-rocky-mountains>

For the first time ever, the National Weather Service actually issued a firenado alert: <https://www.rawstory.com/2020/08/firenado-national-weather-service-issues-americas-first-ever-warning-for-a-fire-tornado/>

The news reports are frightening to watch. Winds have moved these fires at great speeds, putting more people in grave danger than ever and hampering efforts to fight them. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/13/us/Wildfires-Oregon-California-Washington.html>

Additionally, our FFLA national news has included reports of several lookouts being lost to these fires. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those affected by these monster fires.

On a much more positive note, we had another great response to our Facebook photo contest this month. Some great entries were voted on, but hands down our winner this month was a photo Jackie Kline took of Hadley Mountain Fire Tower at sunrise. The photo is in the upper right corner of this page. Thanks to all of you for participating!

Would you rather get paid for your time at a fire tower – several lookout jobs are already listed for 2021 – get em while they're hot! Applications are being accepted through 9/28/20 for 2021 seasonal jobs on all Forests in AZ and NM. Opportunities vary from Forest to Forest. Prescott NF jobs are in fire, recreation and wildlife. <https://go.usa.gov/xGn26> #NotYourOrdinaryJob #ForestServiceJobs

Would you like to vacation in a fire tower? <https://www.cnn.com/travel/amp/rent-fire-lookout-towers-covid-19/index.html>

Our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Lighting of the fire tower event was perhaps the best ever! We had really nice weather and we had many, many volunteers who were willing to give up time on the holiday weekend to drive to the towers, hike to them, light their lights and make the return trip in the dark! This year we had 24 towers participating; Stillwater, Woodhull, Bald, Balsam Lake, Mount Tremper, Red Hill, St. Regis, Stissing, Poke O Moonshine, Overlook, Hunter, Wakely, Goodnow, Mount Adams, Vanderwhacker, Pillsbury, Blue, Belfry, Hadley, Hurricane, the Randall tower, Snowy, Cathedral Rock and Azure all participated! We did a few things differently this year including starting our recruitment a bit earlier than usual, made sure we had clear guidance for all to follow, sent out dozens of press releases, and of course we planned the weather – ha, ha, ha! All of these things made for a successful event, but we can always improve. If you have any comments or suggestions, please do let us know. We thank all of the Illuminators who took part and a special thank you to the NYS DEC Forest Rangers and retired Forest Rangers and the SUNY ESF students who took part! Without all of you, this would not happen.

In a recent conversation with my mom, she mentioned to me that I should re-read *Old Stone Walls Catskill Land and Lore* by Norman J. Van Valkenburgh and try to find his description of a Fire Tower Observer. I did find a wonderful description in the Chapter entitled *People, Places and Things* on page 35 and 36. “...*I had the afternoon to roam the mountain. I decided to continue up the trail and visit my village neighbor, Joe D who was the observer stationed at the Hunter Mountain fire tower or observation station as it's officially called. The trail leveled and it didn't take long to cover the mile to the tower. Patches of snow dotted the thick forest floor and, just before the last short climb to the tower, I waded through a lengthy stretch of it still over one foot deep.*

*Joe saw me coming and waved a greeting from the cabin atop the tower. I took off my pack and climbed the stairs, pausing at each landing to take in the expanding view. My first visit to the tower was in 1944 when I camped overnight at the site. I still looked forward to every trip to this place and today's visit was no exception. As I climbed, the entire Catskills unfolded on a 360 degree sweep, and I recognized many distant peaks I had climbed in the years past. The works of man dotted the valleys but paled into insignificance as the mountains overshadowed them.*

*Joe was glad to see me as I was his first visitor of the day. We talked about the condition of the trail, the upcoming forest fire season, a bear hunt he had been on last fall, the porcupine problem, the variety of visitors to the tower, and generally solved a few of the troubles of the world. With the aid of his field glasses, I picked out many landmarks and watched a hawk circle over a nearby ridge before disappearing behind it in a swift, graceful dive. **It was a relaxing hour and I left with the feeling that this man, this tower, this trail and others like them were not out of place in the Forest Preserve, but instead, enhanced this vast public ownership.**” Thank you for those words Norm. They describe an Observer and their tower perfectly!*

These words clearly illustrate why our Lighting of the Fire Tower Event is so important and why it is becoming increasingly popular. Norm's words express what so many have felt about fire towers over the years. Those who can no longer hike to a fire tower or those who did not previously understand fire towers can make that all important connection through our Lighting Event.

Photos of the event are [here](#). The newsletter is simply not large enough to accommodate them all!

**Belfry History by John Sasso:** John is a wonderful volunteer who has assisted with hands-on fire tower projects and is a wonderful researcher and historian. His recent article on Belfry Mountain may be of interest to fire tower friends. <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2020/09/historical-profile-belfry-mountain-beyond-the-fire-tower.html>

As many of you are aware, before the Covid-19 outbreak, the NYS Chapter of the FFLA had many plans for fire tower work. In the past month, we have found ways to work within the Covid-19 guidelines and still accomplish some of that work. Here are a few updates of what has occurred.

**Bramley Mountain Fire Tower:** August 25<sup>th</sup>, a warm and humid day found the The Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower planning a site visit with Davana LLC to inventory and inspect the fire tower parts. They asked for some FFLA assistance and we were happy to help. Thanks goes to the Clark family who made this work easier with their care in taking the fire tower down in 1970 and storing it safely all these years! The work was an important step in moving the project forward. Thanks to Ann, Rick, Bob, John, Wendell, Jim, Bill, Tom, Dave, Chris, Tom C and Kyle! We completed our work and drove only about 5 miles before the skies opened!



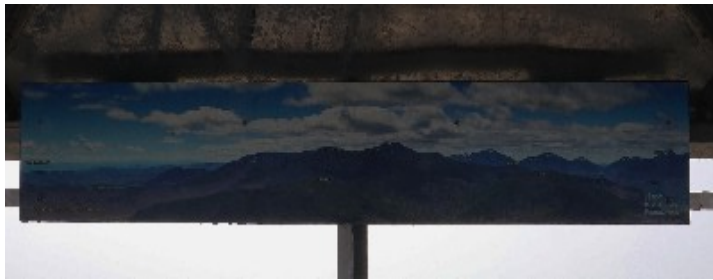
**Pillsbury:** Sunday, August 30<sup>th</sup> found a veteran group of volunteers parking at Sled Harbor (as far as one can drive in 2020) and doing the extra mileage to the summit of Pillsbury mountain with loads of tools in their backpacks. Due to rain on Saturday, we had to make this a one day project. We got a great deal accomplished. We were able to complete two more landings and three sets of steps. We have just a bit more to do to get all of the landings and steps replaced. The long term goal is to get all this work done so the radio folks can come in and upgrade the repeater equipment. Once that is done we can restore the fire tower cab for visitor use! Thanks to Jeremy, Brandon, John, Lori Ann, Shawn, Bruce, and Tom! Your assistance made great strides toward completion of this project and was great fun too!



**Swede:** Warren County has the reins of the Swede Mountain Fire Tower project and made great progress this summer! They were hoping for a final sprint to the finish line before the hunting season began and reached out for some assistance. They had already done great work on cutting out the trail and just needed some help to fine tune things and possibly do some bridge work. On a lovely day we met Tim from Warren County and along with volunteers Chuck, Jake, Dave, Tom and Landon we did some of that fine tuning. We have a bit more to do, but will respect the hunting season closure. I think the county is on track for an opening of this area to the public in the Spring of 2021. Thanks to all who turned out to help and to Warren County for all their work!

**Kane:** We always seem to hear reports of the criminals who use paint, markers, chalk and pen to mark up our historical fire towers. Complaints have been flowing in that this has been occurring at Kane again. Following a delay due to Covid-19, we got things painted over again on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Thank you Tom and Landon!

**Hurricane:** We reported last month that the Friends of Hurricane mountain had produced some really lovely panoramas to place in the fire tower. After carrying the first one up they realized they would not be able to attach them as planned, so back down they came. Earlier this month, they made their adjustments and hiked them back up. They are now in the tower and not only look wonderful, but visitors have really liked them when the summit was fogged in and there was no view.



Thanks so much to the Friends of Hurricane Mountain for all the work in producing these and getting them installed!

**Mount Arab:** The NYSDEC announced that the The Mount Arab Fire Tower in Horseshoe Lake Wild Forest is looking good as new after a paint and restoration job by the [Student Conservation Association](#) Adirondack Corps! Their most recent projects included fixing up the fire tower trail. Many thanks!

**Stissing:** In remembrance of the events of 9-11, the flag flew high from Stissing Fire Tower.

**Cathead:** 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! Scroll down to Sample Letter: <http://nysffla.org/>

In addition to the need for volunteers on the ground (or in the towers as the case may be), we also have a need for funds to complete this work safely (safety kits with hard hats, eye protection, ear protection, etc.) are essential and this year, things like masks, sanitizer, and disinfectant have been needed. We also use some rather specialized tools in our work and many volunteers bring their own from home and generously allow us to use them. All of these items and more are provided through monies from your membership to the FFLA and donations. We have recently received some donations of materials such as hard hats and paint brushes to do this work. We also received generous monetary donations from an anonymous individual and from the Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower. We are very grateful for all of these donations that allow our work to move forward. THANK YOU!!

Last month we mentioned in the newsletter that the Whitney Estate was for sale in the Adirondacks, where Salmon Lake Fire Tower is located. This month we have read several articles about this sale. It appears that the current landowner has no interest in selling the property to the State of New York. He feels they do not have the resources to properly manage and protect the land and waters there.

Thus far this month we have only seen rescues at 2 fire towers in the Ranger Reports, Bald and Azure :

**9-1-2020: Town of Webb Herkimer County Wilderness Rescue:** On Aug. 26 at 3:20 p.m., Herkimer County 911 transferred a call to DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch reporting a 13-year-old boy hiking with his father with an injured ankle on the summit of Bald Mountain. Forest Ranger Candee responded to the scene along with the Town of Webb Police Department and Old Forge Fire and EMS. Through a coordinated effort, responders carried the young hiker from Frankfort to the trail and turned him over to Old Forge EMS for medical treatment.

**9-9-20: Town of Waverly Franklin County Wilderness Rescue:** On Sept. 5 at 4 p.m., DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from a hiker reporting that his wife had injured her ankle about a half mile from the trailhead of Azure Mountain. Forest Ranger Lt. Harjung responded along with Forest Rangers Balerno and Evans, the St. Regis Falls Fire Department, and EMS. Once on scene, Lt. Harjung splinted the injury and the group started slowly making their way down the trail. The injured hiker was able to get down off the steeper slope with the assistance of hiking poles and leaning on the shoulders of rescuers. The responders then placed the subject in a litter and carried her the remainder of the way to the trailhead. The hiker declined additional medical treatment and said she would seek treatment on her own.

### **Fire Tower Closures**

Cathedral Rock Fire Tower continues to be closed to the public.

Stillwater Fire Tower: Closes the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday in October through December 20<sup>th</sup> for hunting season.

Spruce Fire Tower: Closes Oct 24<sup>th</sup> for big game hunting season, northern zone.

The work, support, and camaraderie of this group is growing. We greatly appreciate all of the people who have joined the FFLA (<http://ffla.org/index.html>), joined our Facebook page (search FFLA New York State Chapter and ask to join), assist us with work in the field, work with volunteer groups, do research, provide guest articles, participate in special events, keep us laughing (socks, it is all about the socks) and do much behind the scenes such as this newsletter editor and our web master, Tom. You make this Chapter what it is which is to say a busy, generous, vibrant group of fire tower enthusiasts! THANK YOU ALL!

Laurie

[www.nys.ffla.org](http://www.nys.ffla.org)