



**New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association
March 2022**

While much of New York State may remain blanketed in snow, some areas are not. Fire Season as we know it, a time when conditions exist that support fast moving wild fires, may exist in parts of New York State. Such was the case on February 24th when a report came in for a wildland fire in Suffolk County. From the NYSDEC Ranger Report: **Wildland Fire:** *On Feb. 19 at 11:30 AM, Forest Ranger Hicks overheard a radio call for a wildland fire on the westbound side of Sunrise Highway in the town of Bellport. Ranger Hicks responded and assisted the Hagerman and Bellport Fire Departments. The fire burned approximately .20 acres of land and was extinguished by 1 p.m.**

In other parts of the US, wildfires are causing damage to the forest and to personal property. The Chipola Complex Fire in Florida finally settled down when some wet weather arrived. But not before burning more than 34,000 acres. Homes were damaged and some stunning footage was captured in this article: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/05/us/florida-bay-county-wildfire.html> and another that is worth reading here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/us/florida-wildfire-chipola-complex.html> One of the fires that was involved in the complex was begun by you guessed it - someone burning debris!!!

In New York State the annual burn ban goes into affect on March 16th and will continue through May 14th. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/32060.html> Please respect the ban – it has made a significant difference in the number of wildfires.

*Did you know that there was an entire series of fire towers on Long Island? There were 10 towers all together. These 10 fire towers were once located along the length of the island and are well catalogued on our webpage. Larry Paul, a Fire Warden on Long Island was instrumental in the development of this work along with Retired Forest Ranger, Paul Hartmann. In 1930, the Annual Conservation Commission report noted that spring wildfires caused a great deal of damage to many state parks there. A committee was formed to develop and organize all of the fire prevention and fire fighting tools on the Island. Part of the plan was to add more fire towers, bringing the number up to 10. By 1960, those numbers were reduced by half to just 5. To read a bit more about these towers, check out the listings on our web page. <http://nysffla.org/alphalist.html>



Take a look at our web page. [Http://nysffla.org](http://nysffla.org) Our webmaster, Tom, has done some very nice updates and we hope we have made the page more convenient to navigate. If you have comments, see errors or would like something added, please do let us know. It is YOUR page and we would love to hear from you.

The winner of our monthly Facebook photo contest for March is Debi Tebano with her photograph of Azure Mt., taken in March of 2020. The photo here is a great example of how a map table could be moved around on the pipe framing to give the Observer the best perspective on any smoke that was spotted. Congratulations Debi! Thanks to all who voted, we ended up with a tie for 2 of Debi's photos. We broke the tie by simply asking Debi to decide which one would be here in our newsletter and the cover photo on our Facebook page. We also thank Debi for her volunteer work at Kane Mt. Fire Tower Observer's cabin!



Fire Tower Museum: Fire Towers are not just found in NYS, they are found nationwide and all over the world. We are blessed to have many who have worked so hard to preserve the towers and their history. One such person is Ray Kresek. Have you been to the Fire [Lookout](#) Museum in Spokane, WA? Well, if you have not, these new videos will make you want to get there sooner! Thanks to Eric Willhite and Tammy McLeod for doing the interviews and compiling the video footage. Ray Kresek is an absolute wealth of knowledge so enjoy the virtual tour!! Ray Kresek Utube videos:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXrsytYKJ6wmjaX1o4_orxg/videos

AARCH: Last month we talked about meeting the new Executive Director, Erin of AARCH and the presentations they held. This month, we got to see the work they did on their AARCH Newsletter that focused on fire towers. If you have not yet had a chance to look at it, please take a moment to do so. They focus on the volunteer work that has gone on behind the scenes to restore the fire towers and to provide an ongoing educational presence as well. <https://aarch.org/learn/newsletters/>

Blue Mt Summit Steward Job Opening: The full advertisement is on the web page and can be viewed at <http://nysffla.org/announce.html>

Loon Lake Fire Tower: Loon Lake Fire Tower, located in the northwestern Adirondacks, is one that remains standing but cannot be climbed at this time. I have always said that the FFLA will help however we can, but we need to have a local presence, people who care about a tower and its history. Those people who care can be found in Loon Lake! Talks with folks there and with the NYSDEC have gotten us to a point where the DEC is aware of both our interest and the local interest. They are planning on having an engineering report done this year so that we can all know what would be necessary going forward and how best to proceed. It has been a real pleasure for me to discuss this possible project with Matt, George and the NYSDEC. Matt and George both have some really nice articles about Loon Lake in the February Homeowners Association Newsletter.



<http://www.loonlakehoa.org/LLHA%20Communicator%202-22.pdf>



Speculator/Makomis Fire Tower: As the spring months are almost upon us, so is the last chance to help out this fire tower project! There are still some steps for sale and donations are also welcome. The site of the former Makomis Fire Tower will be at the community park near the entrance to the Sacandaga Pathways and the Route 66 buildings. To donate to this worthwhile project and help make it a reality, write, phone or call, the Village of Speculator P.O. Box 396 Speculator, NY 12164 518-548-7354 makomistower@gmail.com The Lake Pleasant Public Library will have a display on fire towers from mid-April through June. The focus will be on 2 of the fire towers that once served the area; Hamilton and Pillsbury. We will be including some information on Makomis as well. Stop in and see what they have!

Past FFLA NYS Director and Author of our weekly Throwback Thursday Tower posts on Facebook, Fred Knauf, has written columns for this newsletter in the past. Fred's previous columns spoke of the growth and development of this fledgling organization, the FFLA. Those past columns have really set the stage for the work of the FFLA. In this month's installment, Fred tries to explain a bit about the attitudes and emotions of getting this fledgling organization going in New York State.

“So, does that mean that you do not have homeowner’s insurance?”

That was the question I would pose to anyone in any relationship to the Department of Environmental Conservation or State politics, back about thirty years ago, when I asked them why all fire towers were closed and unbeknownst to nearly all in the public eye, aerial flight routes cancelled. Yes, I fit the mold in my youthful days of being a little “too rough around the edges”, and I guess coming out and snapping off a snide comment like that might rub some of the troops in the DEC the wrong way. For me, I kept my homeowner’s insurance up to date and lived in a tiny bit of fear that my house may be targeted. Thankfully, that never happened.

The question I asked was one to make the receiver think. We entrust the State's political leadership to place into positions of power, people who can run an organization within the budgeted amounts. Why should those leaders run their part of the State business differently than they would run their homes?

I've learned a lot over the last 30-years and even in 1992 knew that the creation of the Department of Environmental Conservation had gutted the Division of Lands and Forests of most of their funding. Along with that gutting came the closure of the wildfire detection systems. That caused a lot of the DEC senior leadership to be split along a very sharp and painful crevice. On one side were those "old timers" who firmly believed that all wildfire is bad and must be stopped as soon as possible. Their last bastion of proof was the horrendous fires of 1988 in Yellowstone National Park that were considered wilderness fires, to let them burn. When the Park didn't receive the routine rain, then those fires grew into monsters that devoured that Park through to snowfall. "We wouldn't want a Yellowstone in the Adirondacks" you might hear from this side of the crevice. Within the DEC, however, this group knew their place and remained a silent majority of the Foresters, Regional Directors, Captains and Rangers.

The other side of the crevice was what I'll term as "the pragmatics". These members believed that some fire is actually good, and that the general public can garner enough reaction & protection for the state. The DEC's new role, to them, was in policing and search & rescue (not that these were not a part of their role before). Forest management was not going to be a part of the Ranger's work unless a fire broke out and then they would get involved to fight it and perform mop-up. They would leave forest management up to the Foresters in the Department and management of land, historical places & things such as fire towers were left in limbo to this group. Fires in New York simply will not burn like they did / do out west.

When the FFLA formed and I began my role as NYS Director, I didn't have the wisdom to see these vast differences clearly, nor did I have the savvy that comes with experience to navigate this crevice without falling in on many occasions. I also did not have the time to dig deep enough to understand the sides well, and by the end of 1991, when I heard of the plan for all towers to be down by 1995, there was concern that needed another route.

Dr. Keith Argow had spoken at one of the FFLA's Directors Meetings – where he stated that "A small forest owner can not afford a small wildfire". With something like 7 million acres, the DEC could accept a small fire here and there, but what if that fire burned into a forest owner's property of say, 100 acres and destroyed his forest a year before harvest? That takes on a different perspective and the word everyone in the State dislikes comes out...lawsuit. In my discussions with those in high places, I would ask whether a private landowner could sue the State for damages if the DEC did not detect a fire in an appropriate time that burned into their forest and destroyed the value. I was trying to get these entrenched public servants to think like a landowner, and I believe it had a little benefit at softening some of the hardcore "all towers down now" thinking. Sadly, though, it didn't aid in getting any of the towers restaffed.

The other route I tried to take was to get the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation on-board, and work in that manner was done while Ranger Greg George and Jack Freeman worked on the preservation of the Blue Mountain tower and cabin – the first effort in the State. We all know where that "friends" group went, spreading to many other tower projects. Behind the scenes, the OPRHP curtailed the destruction of the DEC's plans until their study could be completed. The logic I was applying with them is that there was enough historical need for towers and not those stuffed into museums. And yes, I even asked those in the OPRHP whether they had cancelled their homeowner's insurance. (To be continued)

I am grateful that we have seen some changes since 1992, most notably we have seen a resurgence in the use of fire towers for educational/public relations purposes and in the restoration of fire towers as they present a destination for many outdoor recreationists. Fire towers also serve a very useful purpose as radio repeater stations, allowing not only our NYS DEC personnel to communicate with one another, but also our local emergency responders, school bus drivers, highway crews and more. None of these positive changes would have occurred without the assistance of volunteers! We are very, very grateful for all of the volunteers who have gotten us to where we are in 2022 as well as the NYS DEC and NYS OPRHP who have assisted us.

But our work is not done. The elements, age, politics and vandalism all work against us at times. To keep our work alive and vital, we need you to lend a hand. We sincerely hope that you can find a day in 2022 to volunteer to lend us a hand.

This year we hope to have several volunteer steward programs going. Each program will come with an orientation session to get you started and a uniform. Locations vary from drive ups to pretty gentle hikes. Will you please consider giving one of these programs a day of your time? Check the calendar below for Orientation dates. We hope to firm up additional dates and times next month.

Calendar

Saturday, April 23rd: Jackie Jones Fire Tower Orientation

May – Blue Mt. Observer's Cabin Work, Buck Mt. Trail Work

Saturday, May 7th: Wildflower Walk at Hadley Mt Fire Tower

Saturday, May 14th: Spring Trail Work at Hadley Mt Fire Tower

Sunday, May 15th: Berry Hill Fire Tower: Orientation

June – Lyon Mt. Trail Work, Stillwater Trail Work, Buck Mt. Trail Work and Tower restoration

Saturday, June 4th: Stillwater Fire Tower: Orientation and Spring Trail work

Sunday, June 5th: Kane Fire Tower: Orientation

July – Speculator Tower Work, Pillsbury Tower Work

August – Pillsbury Tower Work

September – Lyon Mt Trail Work

October – Stillwater Trail Work

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
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