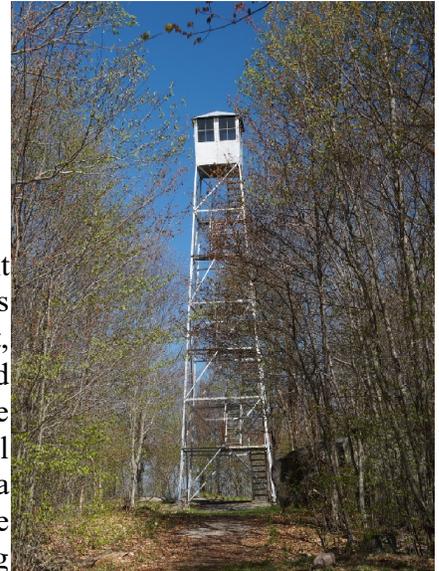




**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
May 2022**



Every month I begin this newsletter with items that did not make it into the previous issue and I add to the content as the month goes along. Sometimes I wonder if we will have enough content, sometimes I wonder how we will fit it all into one newsletter! And sometimes, things change over the course of the month and a once newsworthy items may no longer be pertinent. Since our April newsletter (sent when a blanket of wet, heavy snow covered the area near me), we have had numerous wildfires reported. We had very little rain, low humidity and a few days some high winds created red flag warnings.

We've got numerous fire tower success stories to report this month and sadly, we have some not so successful stories too. We have a bit of history, some information about one of our favorite animals or pests depending on your point of view, and a fund raiser challenge for all of you readers!

Let's start this month with congratulations to Bill Hill, the winner of our monthly Facebook photo contest. His picture is of Cathedral Rock fire tower, prior to the leaves coming out in 2018. Congratulations to Bill! We are very grateful to all of you who participate in this monthly contest. For June 1<sup>st</sup>, we are thinking of adding an extra category. Porcupine photos!

Yes, the often misunderstood porcupine is an animal that is often involved in former Fire Tower Observer stories. In some locations, these vegetarians are thought of us significant pests! At Hunter Mountain Fire Tower they had such problems, they built a garage to house the Observer's vehicle so that the porkies would not be able to chew the brake lines! Another Hunter story that you can find in Marty Podskoch's book on Catskill Fire Towers comes from Bill Spencer who remembers that "Mom said the porcupines were constantly chewing on the logs of the cabin. She was a crack shot, and when she saw the procupines through the chinks in the logs, she would grab her gun and shoot them while still in bed."

Mike Todd, legendary Observer at Balsam Lake Mt. Fire Tower, claimed the porcupines "drove him crazy! The only way to protect the buildings was to kill the pests. He claims to have shot over 900 of them!" In the Adirondacks, Observer Jim Cranker at Black Mt, said they were "a constant menace." He said he "had heard that when small their quills were not yet formed and remained soft. He came upon one while walking just below the summit and without further thought, he bent down and picked up a baby porcupine, bare handed. Well I can tell you that baby porcupines have fully functional quills! I had to pull a half dozen of them out of my hand."



Some scientific information about these misunderstood animals can be found here. <https://www.oriannesociety.org/uncategorized/porcupines-bark-eating-beasties-northern-woods/?v=400b9db48e62> Do you have a porcupine story to tell?

## National and State Fires

Fire season is in full swing across the entire United States. The largest fire in New Mexico history has been growing for days: <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/16/1098779996/new-mexico-wildfires-southwest-not-unprecedented> burning more than 298,000 acres as of May 16<sup>th</sup>.

Our neighbors in New Jersey had a tough fire at the end of April. Hats off to all of those involved to take care of this one: <https://patch.com/new-jersey/mahwah/mahwah-wildfire-burns-40-acres-contained-ramapo-mountain>

In neighboring New Hampshire they have had a significant fire going in the area of Crawford Notch. According to this news article, it is actually three fires in close proximity that have burned over 100 acres. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IyrD41Bccvk>

One contributing factor to wildfires is fuel load. I have seen the CCC Plantations of the 1940s die and leave large stands of standing dead trees. We are seeing some species of trees affected by invasives such as the emerald ash borer, which is leaving large stands of dead trees. What if it happens to beech trees too? Imagine the fuel load! Here is some more food for thought. <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2022/04/will-beech-trees-go-the-way-of-the-ash-and-the-american-elm-holden-arboretum-others-hope-to-prevent-decimation-of-another-native-tree.html>

In New York State we are seeing some rain and some leaf out which is helping to shade the leaf litter and helps the forest to capture some moisture on the ground. None the less, our Rangers have been busy with numerous fires.

From the April 19<sup>th</sup> Ranger report: **Town of Washington/Dutchess County Wildland Fire:** On April 14 at 2:55 p.m., Forest Ranger Sweeney responded to a fire on Valley Farm Road in the town of Washington. The illegal debris burning scorched 38 acres of private land. After making sure the fire was under control, Ranger Sweeney returned over the next two days to mop up hot spots. By April 16 at 12:43 p.m., the fire was declared out. The 82-year-old homeowner was issued tickets for violating the State's burn ban.

### **Town of Corinth/Saratoga County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 15 at 2:25 p.m., Ray Brook Dispatch requested Forest Ranger assistance with a wildland fire off of County Route 10 in the town of Corinth. Rangers Baker, Poulton, and St. Claire responded, in addition to the Corinth, Edinburg, and Greenwich fire departments. The fire started with an outdoor campfire for cooking and spread to 7.8 acres, destroying a cabin. At 9:12 p.m., the fire was put into patrol status and declared out on April 16.

### **Town of Olive/Ulster County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 15 at 3:45 p.m., Forest Rangers Franceschina, Martin, and Rusher responded to a report of a fire in the town of Olive. The fire was caused by downed powerlines and burned approximately four acres of land. The fire was officially declared out on April 16 at 12:38 p.m.

### **Town of Wawarsing/Ulster County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 15 at 4:50 p.m. Ulster County 911 requested Forest Ranger assistance with a fire at Foordmore Road in the town of Wawarsing. Rangers Franceschina and Rusher responded to the fire, which spread to 12 acres. By 7:30 p.m., Rangers put the fire in patrol status.

### **Town of Woodhull/Steuben County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 15 at 3 p.m., Steuben County 911 requested Forest Ranger assistance with a brush fire in the town of Woodhull. Rangers Cordell and Roberts responded and declared the fire contained at 4:17 p.m. The fire was caused by downed power lines and burned 4.7 acres.

### **Village of Waverly/Chemung County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 15 at 6:10 p.m., Environmental Conservation Police Officer Lifrieri contacted Forest Ranger Lieutenant Wickens about a brush fire on Drybrook Road in the village of Waverly. Rangers Burkholder, Cordell, and Roberts, as well as multiple responding fire departments, put out the 15-acre fire. Ranger Roberts determined the fire started with someone burning brush. Resources were clear at 8:50 p.m. DEC's investigation is ongoing.

From the April 26<sup>th</sup> Ranger report: **Village of Greenwood Lake/Orange County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 22 at 4:45 p.m., Forest Rangers responded to a brush fire likely started by a fire pit in the Greenwood Lake area. Rangers Franceschina and Jahn helped extinguish the six-acre fire and put out hot spots the next day. The fire was declared out on April 23 at 3:43 p.m.

### **Town of Catskill/Greene County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 24 at 2:16 p.m., Ranger Dawson responded to a wildfire in the town of Catskill. The fire started in a garage and spread to an adjacent wooded area. Ranger Dawson helped extinguish the flames, along with numerous fire fighters, containing the fire to one acre. Ranger Dawson declared the fire out at 8:02 p.m.

### **Town of Ischua/Cattaraugus County**

**Wildland Fire:** On April 24 at 5:30 p.m., the Cattaraugus County Sheriff's Department requested Forest Ranger assistance with a brush fire in the town of Ischua. The 0.1-acre fire was put out by the Ischua Fire Department. Ranger Hettenbaugh issued a ticket for leaving a fire unattended and resources were clear at 8 p.m.

From the May 10<sup>th</sup> Ranger report: **Town of Forestport/Oneida County**

**Brush Fire:** On May 1 at 5:45 p.m., Forest Ranger Lieutenant Hoag and Ranger McCartney responded to a brush fire near Round Lake Road in the town of Forestport. The fire burned an estimated nine acres of private land. By 8:20 p.m., the fire was put into patrol status and declared out on May 4.

## **AROUND THE STATE**

**Morgan Hill Observer's Cabin:** Following Warren Johnsen's find of this cabin at the Labrador Unique Area last month, we have had discussions with the folks at DEC about options for saving the cabin. We have begun to reach out to some museums to see if there may be some interest in saving it. Stay tuned!

**Bramley Mt. Fire Tower and Rock Rift Fire Tower:** We were very pleased to read that the Friends of Bramley Mt. Fire Tower and the Town of Tompkins who are the owners of the Rock Rift Fire Tower were both awarded \$25,000.00 by the Delaware County Board of Supervisors last evening. The board allocated more than \$1 million in ARPA funds for four different projects. The Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower and the town of Tompkins Fire Tower each received \$25,000. It is great to see that the importance of fire towers to a community, both in terms of public health and tourism is being recognized. Thank you Delaware County! [https://www.thedailystar.com/news/local\\_news/delaware-board-narrowly-passes-paid-ems-service/article\\_17594d62-01ad-54bb-a308-da098fe60ffd.html](https://www.thedailystar.com/news/local_news/delaware-board-narrowly-passes-paid-ems-service/article_17594d62-01ad-54bb-a308-da098fe60ffd.html)

**Beebe Hill:** We have been very fortunate to find great support from the NYS DEC for working to reopen the Beebe Hill Fire Tower. To that end, the NYS Chapter of the FFLA is now the VSA holder for this tower and Observer's cabin. As we develop the work plans for this agreement, it will be very important to have volunteers who are willing to help. We will need volunteers for repairs and with development of a stewarding program in the future. Is that volunteer you?

**Sterling Forest Fire Tower:** Unfortunately, we have received word that the Sterling tower is now closed pending an engineer's inspection, the same as Jackie Jones. We sincerely hope that the inspection can be completed in a timely manner and no problems will be found. We also hope the plans for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration on September 17<sup>th</sup> will not be affected and can go on as planned.



**Leonard Hill:** Our VSA application for this fire tower is now more than 18 months old and our visit to the tower with the DEC is approaching the 4 year mark. The hold up here is an engineering report as well. The engineer visited in April of 2021, but no report has been received yet.

**Cathead:** We really need all of you to look at the plans for this tower and the opportunity that is available to reopen it to the public. It is rather complicated and has many layers, but if you are in favor of the plan, please let your local representative know so they can vote in favor of it prior to the legislative session ending. Even the Adirondack Council is in favor of some compromise: <https://www.adirondackcouncil.org/page/press-releases-16/news/adirondack-council-supports-cathead-mtn-hatchbrook-conservation-project--1471.html> Support from local Adirondack Representatives is there. Assemblyperson, Matt Simpson says, “We need to find a way to get together on this and get it done,” in the latest article in the Adirondack Explorer: <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/constitutional-amendments-up-against-clock>

**Blue Mountain Lake Fire Tower:** NYS DEC informed us that they were not able to hire a steward for Blue Mountain this year. The State Chapter has done a great deal of work there the last few years and we sincerely hope that there will be no vandalism or issues at the summit without that steward presence.

**Mount Tremper:** Per the Catskill Center - “The Cab on the fire tower at Tremper will not be opening this year due to safety concerns. The floor and windows need replacing. The tower as always is open up to the cab.” We sincerely hope that the necessary repairs are made a priority as there are very, very limited or nonexistent views without the fire tower cab at Mt. Tremper. For years, the surrounding forest has grown taller and taller and while there is a clause to maintain the view shed in the UMP, it has not been done. It is puzzling to me that the Catskill Advisory Group recommendation to hold a fire tower challenge in 2022 did not include these necessary repairs as a priority. I would think it would make visitors feel very uneasy if the cab is in such a significant state of disrepair that it cannot be opened. They may wonder about the rest of the tower too.

**Kane:** If you are still interested in stewarding, we could use a few more people. Thanks to the Town of Caroga for helping recruit. <https://caroga.town/notices/do-you-love-the-kane-mountain-fire-tower/>

**Berry Hill:** On May 15<sup>th</sup> we held orientation for new volunteers for our steward program here. We had a very nice turn out and we had several veteran volunteers who joined us to provide their expertise. We managed to get some tasks accomplished in preparation for the season, do some planning, and get to see a kildeer nest, complete with a parent bird performing the broken wing dance to pull us away. The NYS DEC has amended our VSA agreement to include the Volunteers hosting large groups at the tower. This is a fabulous location for those who may have some accessibility issues, there is an accessible port-a-john, picnic tables, shade trees, an Observer's cabin museum and for those who wish to climb the tower – wonderful views! Let us know if you would like to hold an event here please. Thanks everyone!

**St. Regis:** The St. Regis group has been busy with the completion of their painting project already this spring. It is quite a challenge to have the tower be dry enough to apply paint, have no visitors and, oh, there is that hauling of the paint to the top too! These projects often take a couple of years to complete. The Friends are hoping that their new panoramics wintered well and if so, they will be planning on creation and installation of the other two this year. Once again they will be partnering with Paul Smith's Watershed Institute to fund a steward at the tower 3 days a week. Ethan will be returning to the steward position again this year. A local student who also worked at the VIC (Paul Smith's Visitor Information Center) all winter, Ethan brings a wealth of information to the position. Stay tuned for some more plans with the VIC this summer.

**Hadley:** Hadley Mountain Fire Tower Committee held two events this past month. One was a wildflower walk and one was a trail maintenance trip. Many participated. Flowers were found everywhere, though a bit behind in bloom times, rocks were moved, water bars cleared, and the Observer's cabin was spruced up. The only concern – way too many dog poop bags! Come on people, let's pack it out please!

**Balsam Lake:** On Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup> a group of volunteer stewards carried materials to the summit for the upcoming season. These items included all that was necessary for solar power for the Observer's cabin so that we can have appropriate lighting for all of the museum displays inside. We also had a table donated so that we can display some items out in the summit clearing. Visitor education materials such as LNT items, hikeSafe items and of course, Smokey Bear items are all available. New volunteer stewards and veteran stewards took care of graffiti removal and other tasks as well attended training. Thanks everyone. One of the new stewards made an interesting video of the days events, thanks Jay.  
<https://youtu.be/7owNbRbAIL0>

**Stillwater:** We sure could use some more volunteers to sign up as stewards at this well restored fire tower! What a great place to spend a day or two days! One of my favorite trips was camping nearby and visiting the fire tower. Or you could also plan to steward one day and take the boat to Beaver River (the only way to get there) on another day! A beautiful area to explore and a wonderful tower to steward at. Give me a shout out please!

## **FIRE TOWER HISTORY**

**Fire Tower Presentation:** The Lake Pleasant Public Library and the Historical Society of Lake Pleasant & Speculator are excited to be hosting “The History of Fire Towers in the United States, New York State & Locally.” Laurie Rankin, Director of the New York State Forest Fire Lookout Association, will be giving this informative presentation on Saturday, June 4, at 7 p.m., in the Adirondack Room of Lake Pleasant Public Library. Join us as we look back and learn about the importance of fire towers and the people who tended to them. Refreshments will be served. \*

**Longware Postcard Collection:** Gretna Longware was an Elizabethtown native who loved her community and surrounding area and particularly loved the Hurricane Fire Tower. Gretna passed away in 2010. When you read her obituary you get a real sense of her generosity to her community in numerous ways. <https://obituaries.pressrepublican.com/obituary/gretna-lewis-longware-733962102> Following her death, her family donated several items to the NYS Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association. Among the items included in this donation was a post card collection with some interesting images. We have scanned all of them and place them here on the website for your viewing pleasure. We thank Gretna's family for these items and for continuing her spirit of generosity to the fire tower community. <http://nysffla.org/longware/longware.html>

**Hiring Documents:** We recently received some amazing historical documents relating to the hiring of District Ranger Stratton Todd for the position in District 5 of the Catskills. These documents date back to 1896 when Ranger Todd was first hired by the Jay Gould family. The next letter dated 1900 recommends Ranger Todd for the job of Game Protector and the final document is dated 1915 and appoints Ranger Todd to the District Ranger position for a salary of \$1500.00 per year. In that same document Ranger Todd is asked by Commissioner George Pratt to please make recommendations for 3 Ranger positions and the Observer at Hunter Mt. We thank the Todd family for their generous donation of these documents and photographs and hope to get them on our web page soon.



**Lighting Event 2022:** Ready, Set, Go! Start organizing! The date is Saturday, September 3<sup>rd</sup> with Sept 4<sup>th</sup> being the rain date if needed. We have been blessed with fabulous weather the last 2 years, let's make it three in a row! August 24<sup>th</sup> will be the deadline to register, so start your planning now. Will you participate? Who will be your Illuminator? What are the best locations to view the tower from? Who do you need to send press releases to to promote the event? Start your planning today. More information is on the website: <http://nysffla.org/light.html>

**FFLA Fundraiser:** With HUGE thanks to past FFLA Chair, Fed Knauf for his generosity, we present a unique opportunity for each of you. In Fred's words *"My wife thinks I am crazy. Well, she thinks I'll be spending all my summer hours between the basement and garage, so let's see if she is right or wrong. Pictured is one of my "Blue Line Cutting Boards" featuring the Adirondack Park. These are for cutting cheese and not big chopping of meats. I will send anyone one of these provided you place a donation to the New York Chapter FFLA to the tune of \$150 dollars. Yes, that is a lot of money, but keep in mind that inflation has risen and is impacting both fuel and food/beverages – things that the NY Chapter needs at this time when tower rehab season is upon us. Heck, even some tools might need to be purchased, and I can't be certain that the coffers of the NY Chapter have that much money in them. Having this fund will go a long way to ensuring that Laurie and Tom, who do so much for the Chapter, won't be broke by the travel expenses, and will have money to fund the things needed for rehab teams.*



*The cost to make one of these cutting boards - between the NY State Red Oak, stain, food-grade varnish, paint, and time is not small, but work doesn't always allow me the ability to jump at restoration projects, so I thought this would be something I could do to "chip in". The cutting board is about 1 foot top to bottom and 8 inches wide and anyone who would haul one of these Park boards up, say, Hadley Mountain, for an afternoon cheese and cracker party, would be the envy of all the other hikers who saw it. The front is multi-stained while the reverse is single toned, and all (paint and stains) are covered in three coats of food grade butcher block varnish. Just like the Park, there are minor flaws here and there, but all in all, these are certainly conversation pieces that can't be found in any nook or cranny gift store in the Park.*

*So, if you have the ability to afford one and are willing to make that tax-deductible donation to the Chapter, all you need to do is send to Laurie Rankin a check for \$150 and once confirmed and received, I'll get one of these off to you, or if demand outpaces the six I presently have, then I'll be a slave to the basement and garage instead of hiking or in the pool. If you do not have Laurie's address, simply send her a message and once she has received the check, I'll get one to the mail box. As my checkbook is somewhat limited (yes, I've been blessed), I must limit the number I'll make to 18 (twelve more). Thus, if you are interested, you better reach out soon. Please let me know if you have any questions.*

### **Fire Tower Closures**

**Goodnow** – cab is closed pending repairs

**Mt Tremper** - cab is closed pending repairs

**Sterling Forest** – tower is closed pending inspection

**Jackie Jones** – tower is closed pending inspection

**Beebe Hill** – tower is closed pending repairs

**Calendar:** Check our webpage for the upcoming calendar events. Due to some unforeseen circumstances such as the weather and signatures we are still awaiting some dates for work projects this year. Keep an eye on the web page and we will be certain to put them out there as soon as we can.

<http://nysffla.org/calendar.html>

Laurie Rankin  
Director, NYS Chapter, FFLA  
<http://nysffla.org>

