



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
April 2023**

If our New York State Fire Towers were fully staffed as they often were by mid-April – the Observer's would surely find themselves busy in 2023. As I type this we have very low relative humidity, no leaves, dead and dry debris on the ground, no rain for several days, intense sun and winds – the perfect recipe for wildfires. As you will see, with those conditions we have wildfires, despite the burn ban that is in effect. Red flag and high wind warnings have been posted on and off for the last few days in many areas of the state. There is still snow covered ground up high and an Observer might have had to snowshoe to get their tower, but they could likely see bare ground and smoke from them just the same.

One fire has closed State Route 7 in Schoharie County: <https://www.wbng.com/2023/04/13/emergency-crews-battling-wildfires-schoharie-otsego-counties/>

The April 11th Forest Ranger Report included the following:

Hamlet of Forestville, Chautauqua County

Wildland Fire: On April 8 at 4:10 p.m., Forest Ranger Sprague responded to a wildland fire on Kuhrt Road in Forestville. The local fire department contained the fire before Ranger Sprague arrived about 20 minutes later. The cause of the fire was the landowner burning old vineyard posts. While making a short trip to get more posts, the fire spread. With higher winds and drier land, fires are more likely to get out of control quickly. Ranger Sprague educated the homeowner about leaving fires unattended, even for a short time.

Town of Patterson, Putnam County

Wildland Fire: On April 8 at 7:30 p.m., Forest Rangers Horn and Russo responded to a wildland fire on a steep ridge near Stagecoach Road in Patterson. The fire was burning oak leaf litter and some dead standing oak trees. Rangers and Patterson Fire contained the fire to three acres. By 11 p.m., Rangers put the fire in patrol status.

Town of Austerlitz, Columbia County

Wildland Fire: On April 9 at 4:20 p.m., Forest Ranger Gullen and local fire departments responded to a brush fire in Austerlitz. The six-acre fire was caused by a powerline that burned through three trees before the power was shut off. Ranger Gullen put the fire in patrol status at 7:05 p.m.

Town of Cambridge, Washington County

Wildland Fire: On April 9 at 4:43 p.m., Ray Brook Dispatch requested Forest Ranger assistance with a brush fire in the town of Cambridge. Ranger Carabetta responded to the six-acre fire along with multiple local fire departments. At 7:01 p.m., the fire was put into patrol status.

DEC reminds New Yorkers that the annual statewide ban prohibiting residential brush burning began March 16 and runs through May 14. More [information is available on the DEC website](#).

The winner of our monthly photo contest this month was Kristen Taylor. Her photo of Azure Mt received the most votes in the contest and is the new cover photo on our Facebook page and featured here. There was still some snow when she took this photo in April of 2022. Well done Kristen! Thanks to all who participated.



Around the State

Stissing: The new trail work opportunity at Stissing Mountain has been moved to April 22nd. If you recall, we gave you a sneak preview last month. What a treat to be able to help build this lovely new trail. To sign up, click on this link – thanks for helping out!

<https://www.dutchessland.org/get-involved/events-and-programs/thompson-pond-to-stissing-mountain-trailwork-day>

Town of Minerva Historical Society: Fire towers have many friends. In NYS many of our towers are a century old or older and historical societies are naturally interested and supportive of fire tower preservation. I am pleased to be invited to the Town of Minerva's Historical Society monthly board meeting next week where we will be discussing the history of the Vandewhacker Fire Tower. The pre-fire tower history was well researched by John Sasso and can be found here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TXdksd2pSRxXvml0I9ZVlzFXTmJ65lFi/view>

DEC is Hiring: The NYSDEC would traditionally hire Trail Crew members each summer and they are doing so in the Southern Adirondacks this year. The job posting can be found on our website:

www.nysffla.org

Speculator Fire Tower Festival: Plans are still shaping up and the date has been moved to coincide with our annual Lighting of the Fire Tower Event. Keep an eye on the Events page of the Speculator Chamber of Commerce for more details. <https://www.speculatorchamber.com/events/speculator-fire-tower-festival-2023?theme=speculator>

Mount Beacon: From the Friends of Mt. Beacon comes a disturbing and sad report on March 18th - “Its that time of the year again when we have to do some spring cleaning on the Mt. Beacon Fire Tower particularly the graffiti problem that has been ongoing since the Mt. Beacon Fire Tower was renovated ten years ago. Why people feel its their God given right to deface the Mt. Beacon Fire Tower with their names and life stories is beyond my understanding. I don't care if Banksy himself left a tag on the fire tower, this has got to stop. Perhaps the best way to solve this issue is to reach out to the artist's community in the Beacon area and see if they have any ideas on how to fix this problem. It would be hard to believe that someone would be so thoughtless to mark up someone's art work. Then again, nothing surprises me about what takes place at the fire tower. Aside from the graffiti problem, some morons are using the fire tower for target practice. Thankfully nobody has been injured or killed hiking up Mt. Beacon by stray bullets.” We reached out to the Friends group with some suggestions, including law enforcement involvement. Graffiti is a crime and one that is punishable by jail time and fines depending on the severity of it.

Dickinson Hill: On March 27th Grafton Lakes State Park (GLSP) held a Volunteer Open House providing information about all of the various opportunities for volunteering at the Park. We are pleased to partner with them in 2023 to begin a pilot Volunteer Fire Tower Steward Program. At this open house there were several people interested in doing this. But we could still use some more stewards – what do you say, can you help us for a day or two this summer?

We have been working with the Park to develop a handbook for the program, to provide materials for the program, training, and guidance. Riley, the SCA Environmental educator/event assistant at the Park will be at the tower on some of the days this summer. But we are looking for a few other people to be stewards at Dickinson Hill. We think this is an exciting opportunity and hope that you will consider signing up for a day of stewarding! Photo courtesy of GLSP shows Riley getting them interested in stewarding.



Visits this month included – Sterling, Jackie Jones, Makomis at Speculator, Hunter, and Kane.

Catamount: Hiking the Trail to Yesterday by Bill Hill has a great write up about this peak which was home to first a wooden fire tower and later a steel fire tower. This month we saw another hiker discover it too in this Explorer article: https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/catamount-colton?mc_cid=ef181d7113&mc_eid=52401a349c – I think there are a lot of Cat lovers in the fire tower world.

Telecommunicators Week is April 9th through the 15th. NYSDEC and the Adirondack Almanack saluted the great work done by Dispatchers at the Ray Brook office.

Author and Retired NYS Forest Ranger Lou Curth shared the following comments: “*DEC recognizes National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week April 9 to 15. Dispatchers are an invaluable emergency response resource, as they are often the first person receiving a call for help.*

Some history for Adirondack Almanack readers: This recognition of the important work done by DEC's dedicated dispatchers at Ray Brook is well deserved and long overdue.

Back in the 1960s when I began my duties as a NYS forest ranger, communications were limited primarily to landline telephone messaging provided during the fire season by the cadre of dedicated Forest Fire Observers on duty in our mountain top fire towers, and also via the telephones which were a required fixture at every ranger home/ headquarters. In those days, forest rangers were most often a family affair, with wives and children routinely answering phone calls and relaying ranger related messages. Some surplus W.W. II sight-to-sight radio equipment was also in limited use.

During the dry fire years of the 1960s, much was done to modernize the capabilities of the forest rangers to respond to all kinds of emergencies. This included the purchase of state-of-the-art two-way radios for the fire towers and district offices, and portable radios (each powered by eleven D cell batteries) for forest rangers to carry while out on patrol. This modern technology paved the way for the creation of the first forest ranger dispatch system which was inaugurated during the 1970s, not at Ray Brook, but rather in the Saranac Lake residence of two dedicated local people – Roland and Jackie Patnode.

A tip of my old ranger Stetson goes out to each and every one of our dedicated dispatchers, then and now, in appreciation for their fine work in support of the forest rangers.”

Thank you for your comments and information Ranger Curth. Communications continues to play a major role in our NYS Fire Towers where many contain radio repeater equipment and are still used during times of high fire danger as a command center due to good communications. The phone has changed a bit over the years. Observer Kelly from Blue Mt in 1919.



There are so many opportunities to provide assistance to our organization, which in turn provides assistance to other Friends groups and municipalities throughout NYS. One way to provide assistance is to simply become a member, It is easy, it is relatively inexpensive (only \$15.00 per year); you can make a monetary donation – <http://ffla.org/donate.html>; you can join us on a work project – those can be found at the end of this newsletter and on our webpage under calendar; you can become a volunteer steward; or you can provide refreshments for a work project.

Let me introduce you to another group of people who assist our NYS Chapter; our Executive Committee is made up of myself, Michele K, Sue K, Fred, K, Adam N, Debi T, and Pat T. Each has already made significant contributions and are now assisting behind the scenes as well. We greatly appreciate all of their work and want to give them a big shout out of THANKS!

Michele stewarding at Berry Hill, Sue staining the walls at Blue Mt Observer's cabin, Fred, far left painting at Buck Mt Fire Tower.



Adam painting over graffiti at Dickinson Hill, Debi and Pat stewarding and picking up trash at Kane.



Increase your knowledge: Take the Leave No Trace on line course to learn more about the 7 principles of LNT and ways that you may educate others about them. https://lnt.org/courses/online_awareness_take_action_html5/#/

Grant Award: An FFLA Grant was awarded to Warren County for work at the Swede Mt Fire Tower. We look forward to partnering with Warren County to do some work there in 2023.

Tower Closings/Seasonal Road Closures/Trail Closures

Sterling Forest and Jackie Jones - Towers are closed pending inspections.

Beebe Hill - Tower is closed pending repairs.

Goodnow: The Goodnow Mountain Trailhead, Trail and Firetower are CLOSED until further notice to accommodate an active timber harvest.

Moose River Plains Recreation Area: Due to inadequate snowpack, the gates to Moose River Plains have been closed for the winter snowmobile season. This affects the trailhead to Wakely Fire Tower.

Calendar for 2023

4-29-23: Orientation for Berry Hill stewarding

May 2023: Buck Fire Tower and Trail dates to be determined as weather allows

5-13-23: Orientation for Dickinson Hill stewarding

5-20-23: Mt Adams trail work – <https://adkhighpeaksfoundation.org/mt-adams>

6-3-23: Orientation for Stillwater stewarding and Spring Trail Work

6-10-23: Orientation for Kane stewarding

6-10 & 11: Lyon Mt Trail Work – best weather day

7-7 – 9: The 2023 FFLA Western Conference will be held in St. Regis, Montana

7-20-23: Lyon Mt brushing in switchbacks

7-29 and 30: Snowy work project to repair fencing and railing, maybe paint?

8-5, 6, 19, 20, 26, 27: Pillsbury work project to finish the cab if radio equip is moved, clean summit, repurpose lumber for board walk

8-12 and 13: The 2023 FFLA Eastern Summer Regional Conference will be held in Andover, N.J.

9-2-23: Fire Tower Festival in Speculator

9-2-23: Lighting Event 9-3-23: Lighting Event Rain Date

9-16 & 17: Lyon Mt Fall Trail Work

Laurie Rankin, Director
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www.nysffla.org