



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

The most deadly wildfire in our country's history that has just taken place in Hawaii is a sad way to begin a New York State newsletter. Our hearts, our thoughts and our prayers go out to the people who have lost loved ones, homes, and businesses in this devastating and fast moving wildfire. It is a sad reminder of the potential of fire to become deadly in a moment. Yet, it also provides us with stories of hope and recovery and it provides us with a much better understanding of the need for fire towers and the early warning system that they were a part of. I said “were” because we no longer use the towers in NYS for that purpose. Yet, in this past month, I was blessed with the opportunity to attend both the Western and Eastern Conferences of the Forest Fire Lookout Association. At both of those conferences we were able to visit working fire towers and that helps us to keep our mission of rehabilitating, restoring, and maintaining the NYS structures in the forefront so that we can utilize the towers again in the future as part of an early warning system if the need arises. It also strengthens our Stewardship programs that provide the historical information to the public about the purposes of our towers and how to care for the surrounding forests too. From the ashes, let hope and potential rise!



R.J. Reakes, one of our FFLA Volunteers had the most likes in our photo contest this month with his photograph of Wakely Mt. Fire Tower taken in August of 2018. Congratulations RJ and thanks to all who submitted photos and liked their favorites!

As we continue to look at the news around our country, you must take a moment to check out this:

<https://www.kpax.com/news/firewatch/above-it-all-one-man-has-spent-almost-5-decades-as-a-fire-lookout>

I met John at the Western Conference, what a wonderful man who loves being on a lookout, 48 years worth of love! You too will smile!



Forest Ranger News

Fires continue to burn at our neighbors in the north where several of our Forest Rangers were sent to assist: <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/rangers-quebec-fires>

In addition to the deployment above, there have been others; From August 7th, “DEC Announces Forest Rangers Deployed to Idaho and Montana. DEC Forest Rangers and expert wildland firefighters are being deployed to assist with efforts to contain the Ridge Creek Fire in the Idaho panhandle and the Niarada Fire in northwestern Montana. New York State often deploys highly trained wildland firefighters to help battle wildfires as part of interstate and international firefighting compacts. The DEC Forest Ranger assisting in Montana will serve as a Task Force Leader and help coordinate the response to a fire that is currently estimated at 10,400 acres and zero percent contained. The fire on Bureau of Indian Affairs lands 12 miles west of Elmo, Montana, is currently threatening several structures. A pair of Rangers are also deploying to Idaho to assist with efforts to contain the Ridge Creek Fire north of Coeur D'alene. DEC Forest Rangers have deployed three times this summer to assist with efforts to help contain wildfires in Canada, where more than 4,000 fires have burned an estimated 23.7 million acres.”

WOW – The commissioner is puzzled by the need for the Forest Rangers to have appropriate winter gear? What a disconnect. <https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/forest-rangers-launch-initiative-to-fund-equipment-training-support#comments>

To find out additional information, please visit the Foundation website where a fire tower icon is being utilized. Please consider supporting our friends: <https://www.forestrangerfoundation.org/>

Around the State

Goodnow: The trail to the fire tower has reopened! Following the reopening of State Route 28N (please continue to allow for some extra time when traveling in the area as repairs continue) and a thorough inspection of the trail, they were able to reopen the trail to the fire tower.

St. Regis: The Friends of St. Regis have provided us with lots of good news in the last month. On July 16th, the Friends posted the following on their Facebook page: “If you have been to the tower in the last 2 days while Summit Steward Ethan was there, you saw the newest addition: we are now flying our country’s flag! On Friday board member Rich installed the bracket and arranged with Ethan the flying of our flag on days that he is there. It is truly a beautiful site and can be seen – with binoculars – from many places around our region. Take a hike Friday, Saturday or Sunday when Ethan is there and enjoy it up close and personal!”

Then on August 12th they shared some more good news: “The Friends of St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower and the Paul Smith's College VIC have partnered to produce a display about the fire tower. Check it out in the Great Room at the VIC.” We had the opportunity to check it out and are so pleased with all the good work this Affiliate Group is doing!



Lyon Mt: I had the pleasure of being joined by Brenda B on Lyon Mt for some trail work, some fencing repairs and general fire tower maintenance last month. We had an exceptionally beautiful day and were pleased to find that very little damage had occurred on the trail from the recent strong storms. The road into the trailhead, now that was a different story. Proceed with caution!

Berry Hill and Bowman Lake State Park: I presented a slide show about connections between these two on July 22nd. While it was lightly attended, those in attendance did request a repeat of the same to both the local Bird Club and the Park guests again in 2024. We happily committed to both! We will also include a hike to the tower from the Park as part of our 2024 event. Thanks for inviting us! Following the presentation we did go to Berry Hill where stewards Ed and Sue had three generations in attendance. Grandmom and grandson were up on the tower checking it all out while Mom enjoyed one of the benches from below with baby sister. As soon as the grandson was on the ground he went to Steward Ed and asked to go in the Observer's cabin and get his Smokey sticker! To see that little boy have such a positive experience and to reach for Ed's hand after coming down from the tower was a joyful moment that I wish I had captured on camera. Moments such as those are one of the many benefits of being a steward and it makes such a positive message for the visiting public. We trust this will cause this young person and his family to support our work and all fire towers because of that experience!

Owls Head: Many thanks to volunteer Donna M who carried a gallon of paint and other necessary tools back to Owls Head Fire Tower to cover over graffiti! She had to wait several days to accomplish this following early July storms that closed many roads. The trail was very wet, but only one tree was down and no other significant wash outs were noted. Thanks Donna!

Azure Mountain: Our Azure Mountain Friends Affiliate sent out their newsletter recently and included a bit about our monthly photo contest! It also includes some amazing testimonials by the Stewards who have participated in that annual program. The excerpts from their 2022 stewards were very heartwarming to read. To hear the heartfelt thoughts of those who are willing to spend the day stewarding is something we hope to do more of in this newsletter. Here are a few examples. From Joey – *“Every time, my journey to the top of Azure Mt provided different experiences.”* From Brooke - *“One hiker asked me about the snake populations on the mountain. I had never thought about that!”* From Charlotte - *“The scholarship opened my eyes to my own self-discovery.”* Check it out on their website: <https://www.azuremountain.org/>

Stissing: Would you like to be part of the new fire tower trail? If the answer is yes, then check out this website and sign up for a day <https://www.dutchessland.org/get-involved/events-and-programs/thompson-pond-to-stissing-mountain-trailwork-drop-in-thursdays>. Our Affiliate Members, the Friends of Stissing Landmarks have been working on this great new trail for quite some time. It is nearly complete and the plan is to hold a grand opening on September 23rd, so hurry!

Bramley Fire Tower: At their monthly meeting, the Delaware County Board of Supervisors debated the issue of assisting the Friends of Bramley Mt Fire Tower with their work to return the tower to the summit. In the end, the vote was in favor of providing that assistance! https://www.thedailystar.com/news/delaware-board-takes-on-fire-tower-project/article_19aa5e4c-2be4-11ee-b5bf-179c8119c719.html We are very grateful to the Supervisors and Economic Development Director, Glen Nealis for their support of this important project. As the newspaper noted in a second article a few days later, this tower will be a great asset to the region! https://www.thedailystar.com/opinion/columns/robert-cairns-delhi-fire-tower-will-be-an-asset-to-the-region/article_0f174580-3229-11ee-a8b9-0b89e5e58a93.html

Mount Arab: We wanted to remind visitors that trains are running again on the Adirondack rail line. The tracks cross the road near the Mt Arab parking lot. Be sure to stop and look for trains & especially on weekends when trains are frequent. An update suggests that some tracks were washed out in a recent downpour, but please still be vigilant.

Running the Numbers: Our state chapter works hard to recruit and train volunteers who are willing to spend time at fire towers as stewards. We are blessed with many who have taken on that task and interact with dozens of hikers. I thought it might be interesting to see the numbers.

Kane - 798 visitors on 11 days - an average of 72.5 per day!

BLM – 714 visitors on 14 days, 51 visitors per day!

Berry Hill - 126 visitors so far this year. Stewards have covered 13 days with 9.6 visitors per day.

Stillwater - 314 visitors so far this year with 10 days covered for the season is 31.4 visitors per day.

Dickinson Hill - 7 days covered thus far, 122 visitors, average per day is 17.4.

Total Visitors through August 10th: 1360 visitors, 41 days covered, 33 visitors per day.

Fire Tower Festival Canceled: The festival that had been planned in Speculator for September 2nd has been canceled.

Teaching Resources: As we approach the beginning of a new school year, we want to point out a few options for Educators to consider. One has to do with a segment we did with PBS in the past and one has to do with a literary resource we have mentioned here and used in our school programs.

You may remember a few years back Jack LaDuke did a segment for Mountain Lake Journal about the importance of fire towers in the region. PBS has recently created educational resources for PBS LearningMedia ([PBS LearningMedia | Teaching Resources For Students And Teachers](#)) based on that segment. Educators and students in NYS can now access the video, lesson plans, discussion questions, and related vocabulary based on this episode. The educational resources are aligned with NYS standards and the suggested grade bands are 6-8 and 9-12. It is an impactful story.

[The Legacy of Fire Towers in Forest Protection and Preservation | Mountain Lake Journal | PBS LearningMedia](#)

Author of Finding the Blaze, Maryellen Wander Eyer will be at the Catskill Visitors Center on September 3rd at 11:30 to hold a conversation about what's in a backpack, how to find blazes and hiker safety for kids. Her book is geared toward a younger group of kids, perhaps 3rd through 5th grades.

Visits this month: Kane, Lyon, Berry Hill, Catfish, Culvers, and Budd Lake, Former Big Pocono Fire Tower, Big Pocono new tower.

10th Annual Lighting of the Fire Tower Event

Are you ready?? We are!!! We are getting all of the towers lined up, press releases out, plans for the Illumination teams, what lighting devices they will use, viewing locations and more. To see what towers are being lit in your area and what other opportunities might occur as part of the celebration (see the St. Regis and Wakely plans), please visit our website at www.nysffla.org

Calendar

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

Sept 16 & 17: Lyon Mt Fall Trail Work

Sept 9: Friends of Hurricane Mt Fire Tower will do blowdown clearing on the 9N trail up Hurricane. Rain date 09/10. Contact Mary Jean Bland at mjbland@aol.com

Sept 21: Friends of Hurricane Mt Fire Tower will be replacing the fencing on the Hurricane tower. Rain date or finishing replacing efforts 09/27. Contact Mary Jean Bland at mjbland@aol.com

Sept 23: Grand opening of the new trail at Stissing Fire Tower

Membership: Is your membership up to date? Our membership rate is pretty reasonable at \$15.00 per year. Your support through becoming a member and through donations allows us to do the work that we do. Without that, we would not be able to accomplish what we do. Please take a moment to consider becoming a member if you are not already one. If you are already a member, are your dues current? Thank you for supporting NYS Fire Towers! <http://ffla.org/learn-more--join.html>

Eastern Conference

We were able to attend the Eastern Conference of the FFLA on August 12th and 13th hosted by our friends from the NJ Chapter; Co-Chapter Directors Bob Wolff and Ray Grimes and the New Jersey Fire Service at their offices in Andover. The first thing you see when you arrive is the Smokey Bear sign, then you see several model fire towers located around the front of the building, all painted in the appropriate red and white (high visibility so that planes see them) of the NJ towers and all labeled as ones that are in that district. There was no doubt that we were in a location that supports fire towers! While we gathered over coffee, bagels and doughnuts, we got to see numerous displays around the building, all supporting fire towers! What a great facility! Eric Weber, Assistant Division Forest Fire Warden and his crew had prepared a great slide show about the towers we were going to visit later in the day; Catfish, Culvers, and Budd Lake, their history and how they are currently staffed. Both during the morning and later after dinner we were treated to an in-depth look at the training of the Observers in these towers which was very comprehensive and very informative! You will also note that in all of the photos, the towers have a fresh coat of paint. That investment alone by the state of NJ is about \$70,000 per tower. How refreshing to see first hand the investment in these structures and their importance. An evening meal was prepared by an amazing group of people, plentiful, delicious, free, and featured NJ greats the blueberries, tomatoes and sweet corn! Thank you all for such a great day!



Headquarters for NJ forest fire service in Andover



Budd Lake Fire Tower.



Culvers Fire Tower



Catfish Fire Tower

Sunday found us thanking our hosts in NJ and then traveling to Grey Towers Pennsylvania which was the summer home of Gifford Pinchot and where the historic Big Pocono Fire Tower now resides. We were able to tour some of the grounds and if time allowed tour the mansion. We enjoyed hearing first hand the story of how the fire tower had been rehabbed and it sure was not an easy task! From there we headed west to the site of the new Big Pocono Fire Tower. Just a few short years ago the State of Pennsylvania invested 4 million dollars to erect 16 new fire towers. Generally these are not open to the public but for the purposes of our conference, we were offered a tour. While they do not look much like the historical structures, they do serve fire spotting purposes. The state did its homework and really felt that the cost of building new towers and paying staff to work them was cheaper than just one wild fire. <https://stateimpact.npr.org/pennsylvania/2019/05/10/with-new-lookout-towers-pennsylvania-goes-old-school-to-detect-wildfires/>



Historic Big Pocono Fire Tower



New Big Pocono Fire Tower

We hope you have enjoyed all of the news from the last month. We look forward to our 10th Annual Lighting Event in the next few weeks and thank all of our Illuminators for making this happen. Please check out website for updates on that event and other happenings in association with that event. [Www.nysffla.org](http://www.nysffla.org) Just click on Light Up the Night.

If you have any suggestions for this newsletter, please do let us know.

Laurie