



**Forest Fire Lookout Association  
New York State Chapter  
January 2024**

**The National Picture**

January is when we have the Annual FFLA Meeting. I find it to be a meeting that provides fresh ideas, plans, and certainly lets me know I am not alone as many other State Directors have similar successes and challenges.

Conferences were discussed and our New York Chapter has proposed to host the Northeastern Conference in the Fall. Do you have some ideas about what you would like to see and do at the conference? Or how you could help at the conference? All thoughts, ideas, and assistance are welcome!

Who is behind the scenes on the National Level? A new Chairman was voted in, Mike Guerin from California has generously stepped up to take the helm from Brad Eells. We thank Brad for his time and welcome Mike. They have both had big shoes to fill since the departure of Keith Argow, who continues to be involved as Chairman Emeritus. Mike has tasked us with clarifying our vision for the future, our mission, and our structure as an organization. One item that we will be seeking outside assistance on is to update the FFLA website. Is there a suggestion from any of you as to what we should focus on at the National Level? Standing in support of all of you as members and myself as State Chair is Gary Weber, our Treasurer, who is also the Editor of the Lookout Network, the National Membership Chair, and the State Chair for Idaho-north and Montana. Gary always does an amazing job with the Lookout Network magazine. Thank you to all in the administration who keep us going!

How are we doing in New York? You can take a look at our state report as posted on the website: <http://ffla.org/chapter-reports.html>. We have been very busy as the report reflects and that is thanks to all of you, our really wonderful volunteers! What we are not doing really well with is our membership. While we remain stable overall, we continue to have folks who have chosen not to renew and we need to address this. Is that person who did not renew you? If so, what could we do to change your mind? The FFLA voted to keep the annual dues \$15.00 for another year. Do we need to do more outreach about what we do at the towers themselves with outreach materials, at community events, on social media? We will consider all of these items. We are also not doing really well financially as we had far fewer donations in 2023 and we had more expenses. Donations are always welcome and we are very grateful for them. Going forward, we will need to spend more of our time on fundraising rather than tower work. If anyone has any ideas for fundraising events, please share with us. We are working on a few ideas and will share them here and locally too.

It was amazing to hear an observer from Alberta Canada, who talked about the crazy fire season they had in 2023. A total of 1,094 fires burned 2,214,957 hectares of land in 2023, compared to the five-year average of 190,000 hectares. They just got snow in early January and this observer only just came down from his tower. While on the one hand the immense number of fires really illustrated the need for the towers in Alberta, so much burned that there is some concern that they will not be needed going forward as there is little left to burn.

We recently received a packet of some historical information from Retired Kane Mt. Observer Rick Miller. Included in that packet was a letter dated May 8, 1923, to all Forest Rangers and Observers. In the letter from the Conservation Commission, the reason for their work was clearly noted: *“The forest fire situation is a matter of paramount importance and needs the most acute diligence on the part of every employee, and furthermore, requires that each person, of which you are one, give to this service his keenest attention and the exercise of his best ability to cope with the situation.”* Our friends north of the border certainly had to be diligent all through the very long 2023 season! When visitors in 2024 ask about why fire towers were important and why they are on mountaintops, I would encourage you to remind them of the significant fires in Alberta Canada in 2023 and remind them the same dangers once occurred in New York State and may again some day in the future. Thanks very much Rick, for this and other letters, that you donated!

### Correction

With sincere apologies to photographer Emil, I incorrectly identified his winning photo of the month in December. It should have been Lyon Mt., not Loon Lake.

### Photo of the month

This month's photograph of the month, won by getting the most likes on our Facebook page – Doug Randall's photo of his Randall tower, the former Swancutt Hill Fire Tower. At 99' 9” tall, it wins for tallest tower in the state too! Thanks for submitting the photo for the contest and thanks to all who voted. Doug's photo is our new cover photo on the Facebook page too, but you really need to click on the photo to see all of this great International Derrick specimen!

**Smokey Bear:** A few members sent me some information about a Smokey Bear Challenge for local libraries. While it is not clear to me if local libraries are eligible to participate in this program or not, I would ask that you do share this link with your local library. It may be something that they can be involved in or make up something similar on their own! Thanks for sharing!  
<https://smokeybear.com/library-reading-challenge>

**Trivia Question:** What currently standing fire tower in the state is at the highest elevation and what currently standing fire tower in the state is at the lowest elevation? We've got a prize for the winners!



## AROUND THE STATE

**Loon Lake:** Author and Researcher John Sasso is always digging around in archives somewhere and he found something quite interesting about Loon Lake. Something to think about the next time you are hiking to the fire tower. Thanks Johan! <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2023/12/lost-and-never-found-the-case-of-leighton-goodell.html>

**First Day Hikes:** While I did not receive any information about the first day hike that was scheduled for Hadley Mountain Fire Tower, we heard about what a great hike it was at Dickinson Hill! Our FFLA Volunteer Stewards, Adam and Allison, led a great group of people (with assistance from their canine leader, Emma) up to the tower. They sent some photos and said what a fun crew they had! They learned a lot from the friendly folks who came out and will definitely be back next year to guide again! Thanks Adam, Allison, and Emma! Photos courtesy of Allison.



**Bramley Mountain Fire Tower:** Friends of Bramley Mountain's President Ann Roberti and I were guests of 'Inside the Line Catskills Mountain Podcast' this past month. “Welcome to episode 105 of Inside The Line: The Catskill Mountains Podcast! On this episode, I go live with Ann Roberti and Laurie Rankin who are on the board of directors of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower restoration project in the western Catskills. If you need a sticker, email me or go to Camp Catskill! Subscribe on any platform! Share! Donate! Do whatever you want! I'm just glad you're listening! And remember... VOLUNTEER!!!!!!” Links for the Podcast: <https://linktr.ee/ISLCatskillsPodcast>. Thanks for having us!

From the FOBM: “While we are deep into winter, our thoughts are set on June, when we expect to be reconstructing the tower on Bramley Mountain. We will be starting work on scheduling soon and we are developing a training plan, so we would like to know if you would be interested in volunteering one or more days once the tower is up – weekend days from July through Indigenous People's Day. Please email us at [info@bramleymountainfiretower.org](mailto:info@bramleymountainfiretower.org) and let us know.” Thanks for considering!

**Berry Hill:** In the Environmental News and Events for Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Tioga and Tompkins Counties (Region 7) was a link to our Astronomy night at Berry Hill Fire Tower. Thanks for including us! <https://nysffla.org/icymi.pdf>

**Ranger's Wives:** Retired Forest Ranger Louis Curth provided an inside look to something that few were aware of or ever mentioned. The role of a Forest Ranger's wife was an important and very helpful one. I would add that a Fire Tower Observer's wife took on similar roles as well. My Mom often talks of how the Rangers and Observers would meet at the house prior to going out on a work project as the house was the office at the time. It was also the local bakery and Mom was always sure to have a freshly baked pie or cake available along with a fresh pot of coffee for these gatherings! As Lou tells us, these women were heroes! You can learn more in this article: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2024/01/forest-rangers-wives-a-story-of-dedication.html>

**Friends of Mt. Arab:** I received the FOMA 2023 newsletter in the mail recently. Included was a thank you to Steward, Tom Cullen who has greeted many visitors at Mount Arab in his 13 years of service there. Thank you for your dedication Tom! Stewards Colin Tuggle and Sheila Young stepped in and helped out in 2023 as well. Read all of their words about what a great experience it is to be a tower steward! Other news about work on the tower can be found in their newsletter. <https://friendsofmtarab.org/> Just click on newsletter.

**New York State Parks Celebrate 100 years:** Several of our fire towers are on NYS Parks properties. This year, the parks are celebrating 100 years. [https://www.thedailystar.com/news/state-parks-to-celebrate-100-years-with-challenge/article\\_721cf05a-a031-11ee-9466-735c1b8a255a.html](https://www.thedailystar.com/news/state-parks-to-celebrate-100-years-with-challenge/article_721cf05a-a031-11ee-9466-735c1b8a255a.html) They have also decided to make a challenge for this anniversary year. To learn more visit: <https://www.parks.ny.gov/100/challenge/>

**Restoration Grants:** Only one restoration grant was issued nationwide in 2023, and that was to Warren County for a new roof for the Swede Mountain Fire Tower. That work had to be delayed due to the hunting season closure and the winter weather. It is expected to take place in the spring. As you plan for work in 2024, please remember that these grants may be available. <https://ffla.org/restoration-grants.html>

**Towers visited:** Hunter

**Membership:** We encourage all of you to please give some thought to joining our organization. The overview of what we as an organization have done since its inception in 1990 is truly amazing. This link <https://ffla.org/overview.html> will provide you with a bit of history about what this group of fire tower officianados and friends, all volunteers, can accomplish. Our membership is very reasonable at just \$15 annually and helps us in our work. Your volunteer time is also greatly needed and greatly appreciated. One of the FFLA Partners, HistoriCorp's Executive Director Jason said *“You only need to work with a team to save a historic building once to hold the pride and privilege of becoming part of that place's story forever. What does endure from project to project, season to season, are the relationships forged and the genuine experiences gained from working hands-on with the materials, tools, and buildings that hold our histories.”*

### Open/Closed

Spruce Mt. Fire Tower remains closed, but the trail has reopened.

Sterling Forest, Jackie Jones, Beebe Hill, also remain closed. Goodnow fire tower cab remains closed.

## A Century Ago

From the Conservation Commission Report of 1924, we find that 64 stations were operational during the year. Cornell Hill, Chapin Hill, Dickinson Hill, Dix Hill and Hartzfelt Mountain Fire Towers were all erected in 1924, and each had a bit different beginning. While all were a common make and model of tower, funds came from a variety of sources to erect the towers. To me, this illustrated the importance of the towers to the local communities. Only Dickinson Hill remains standing at its current location in 2024 and Cornell Hill remains standing at its new location in 2024. It is anticipated that both towers have local groups that are making plans for centennial events, so stay tuned! More information on each tower and photographs can be found on our website [www.nysffla.org](http://www.nysffla.org).

Cornell Hill (L) was erected with funds from Saratoga County and a local landowner. A 60 foot Aeromotor LS40, it stood guard through 1970. Photo taken by Paul Laskey in 2002.

Dix Hill (R) was erected in 1924 by the Conservation Commission with funds from a nearby landowner. It was a 60 foot Aeromotor LS 40 model which was utilized through the 1948 season. Photo taken in 1947 by Larry Paul.





Chapin Hill (R) was erected with funds from Sullivan County. It was also a 60 foot Aeromotor LS40 and stood through the 1970 season. Photo taken in 1974 by Bob Eckler.

Dickinson Hill (L) was erected by the Conservation Commission with funds from the City of Troy. It too was a 60 foot Aeromotor LS 40 model but it was utilized through the 1973 season. Photo taken in 1952.

Hartzfelt Mountain Fire Tower (R) was erected by the Conservation Commission with funds provided by subscriptions from local landowners and towns. This 60 foot Aeromotor LS 40 tower was removed in 1973. NYSDEC photo taken in 1973.



Stay warm and enjoy the snow!

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