



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

**11<sup>th</sup> Annual Lighting of the Fire Tower Event**

**Saturday, August 31st at 9:00 pm** we hope to have a light begin to shine in the cab of many towers across NY State! Last year we had so many wonderful volunteers that we were able to light 37 towers! We hope to increase that number this year. Because this special event is done to remember those who served in these historic towers, we are going to ask that all Illuminators plan to read the names of those who served in the towers as they turn on the light (don't worry, you can locate the names of the Observers thanks to past FFLA Chair Bill Starr who compiled those records in this document on our website: <http://nysffla.org/observer.html> ). We will begin registration for the event on Wednesday, July 17<sup>th</sup> and we will close registration on August 21<sup>st</sup>.

The idea is to put lots of press releases in the local area, newspapers, on line, radio spots, social media, etc., about when this will occur and invite people to go to locations around the community where they could look up from 9 to 9:30pm, see the light come on at the summit and remember that there was a fire tower Observer there watching over and protecting their homes, businesses, communities and surrounding forest. Thank you to Doug Hamilton for this wonderful idea to honor the past!

To register, or if you have any questions, please reach out to me at [lauriejrankin@gmail.com](mailto:lauriejrankin@gmail.com) and I will send you all the information you will need to be an Illuminator at a tower. Thanks for participating!

**STEWARDSHIP**

From our Kane Mt. Stewards, Debi and Pat T.: “We hope everyone enjoyed this 4th of July! We certainly did by welcoming over 180 visitors to Kane Mt. As summit stewards, we had fun & interesting chats, answered many questions, took lots of pics, and handed out many stickers to visitors from as far away as Seattle, Florida, Georgia & Toronto, as well as those camping on nearby lakes. We had a couple starting the Fire Tower Challenge with us, while another completed theirs with us, and a few generational families with memories of past years on the mountain. A wonderfully fun and busy day! We’re already looking forward to coming back this Sunday!”

And then on Sunday, “We again enjoyed another full day as summit stewards on Kane Mt. We welcomed over 60 visitors from as far away as England, Spain & Germany as well as GA, CO, PA and NH, along with those camping nearby. We enjoyed a few very memorable moments with - a father bringing his 2 young sons up the mountain as his grandfather and father did with him to carry on the tradition, we demonstrated how an alidade works when a young boy asked how the observer’s found a fire, and a lovely young couple from Germany impressed with the beautiful ADK scenery, their first fire tower and our friendliness. We are really enjoying our time spent on the mountain.” Thank you Debi and Pat and all of our Stewards whose joy in being at the tower is passed along to all visitors!

## AROUND THE STATE

From the 6-26-24 Ranger Report comes reports of some wildfires and training to suppress wildfires. Recent rains have certainly dampened things, but the rain has been spotty. We continue to be below normal with low water levels in many areas, so there could be more fires: **Town of Volney, Oswego County, Wildland Fire:** On June 17, at 1:10 p.m., Forest Rangers Petit and Vaile responded to a fire on Route 3. Three fire departments and Rangers contained the fire by 2:30 p.m., but remnants continued to smolder for days. Ranger Vaile issued a ticket to the homeowner for leaving a fire unattended. On June 21, Ranger Vaile declared the fire out.

**Town of Lysander, Onondaga County, Wildland Fire:** On June 20, at 3:47 p.m., Forest Ranger Chappell responded to a wildfire on Avery Road. Downed power lines caused the fire, which burned approximately .2 acres of land. By 4:25 p.m., firefighters put out the fire. National Grid shut off the power and made repairs to the damaged power lines.

**Town of Delhi, Delaware County, Training:** On June 23, Forest Rangers Bink, Ellis, and Seeley taught a basic wildland fire suppression class for 15 firefighters from various volunteer fire departments in Delaware County. The field portion of the class focused on constructing a fire line, the use of hand tools, and safety while performing field operations during a wildland fire.

**Local historians:** Our past Chairman, Keith Argow, talked often of how important “local” was. Fire Towers are by nature a local item, a structure that houses a person who is looking out for the local forest, protecting the homes and communities and businesses there. A fantastic resource that we always need to think about are the local historians. Here is the story of how one local historian came to share his love of history with all of us. <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2024/06/former-clifton-town-justice-town-historian-mark-friden-spearheads-creation-of-local-historical-society.html>

**Snowy Mt. Fire Tower:** Many thanks to John S., Steve and Jennifer H for their work on Saturday, July 14<sup>th</sup> at Snowy. The NYS DEC carried up new fencing a few weeks earlier so the crew only needed to carry the tools and the wire to attach the fencing. I say ONLY as it certainly adds weight to your pack on this long hike and on a very warm day. By the end of the day, the fencing was on the tower and they returned safely. Thanks for making the tower safe for others! Photos courtesy of Jennifer.



**Hunter:** A former Observer at Hunter Mt. Fire Tower, Dede Terns was featured on a local podcast, Kaatscast, recently. While the podcast includes information about other things in the Hunter area, Dede did a good job of explaining what it was like to be up at the tower as a young, female Observer at a time (1970) when the local area included lots of festivals, lots of party goers, and more. <https://www.kaatscast.com/a-life-on-the-mountain-top-with-dede-terns-thorpe-and-ed-thorpe> Dede has stories from her time as the Observer at Hunter Mountain Fire Tower – about ½ way through the podcast.

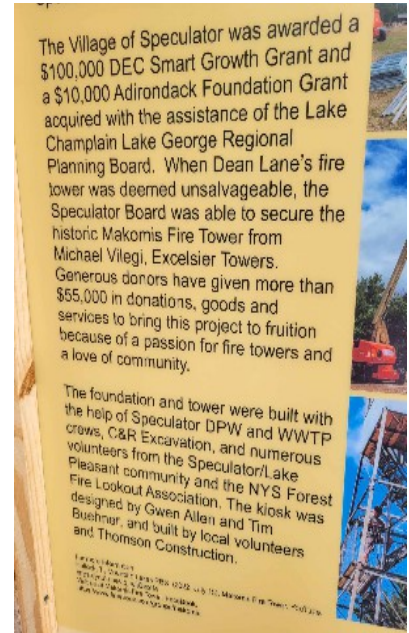
### **Accessibility – Towers to Visit**

NYS DEC states “*The goal of DEC's accessibility efforts is for people with disabilities to be able to participate in and enjoy the benefits of DEC's services, programs and activities. DEC welcomes all visitors to explore state lands, and we are committed to providing an ever-increasing range of accessible outdoor recreation opportunities.*” They currently have an interactive map to show locations of accessible recreational sites, but there are few fire tower sites: <https://dec.ny.gov/places-to-go/accessible-recreation/destinations>. As a person who has had mobility issues for the last several months due to an injury, I have found most fire towers are off limits. Certainly this is something that we all need to be aware of, and we all need to advocate for more opportunities for fire towers that may be accessible. This is not a comprehensive listing, just a few examples that have come to the forefront of late. Berry Hill and Makomis at Speculator sites are accessible and the towers are open, Leonard Hill is accessible and the tower should be restored as well.

**Berry Hill:** On June 25<sup>th</sup> I was very pleased to come across this Facebook post by Assemblyman Joe Angelino, “Today I made the trip to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Berry Hill Fire Tower that sits right on the McDonough/Pharsalia town line. (Chenango County). This piece of firefighting history is open to the public, but not for those afraid of heights because of its 60 feet of steep open stairs. I thought it was worth the trip. He also posted photos of the tower, cabin, the view and a close up of our logo! Thank you so much for your acknowledgment of this great asset to Chenango County and the FFLA! See his Facebook page or [ours](#) (June 26<sup>th</sup>) for details.

**Leonard Hill:** While still recovering from a broken ankle, my fire tower visits have been curtailed. But I really “needed” to get out in the woods and to visit a tower. Thus, my husband and I found ourselves packing a picnic lunch and taking a ride to Leonard Hill Fire Tower. As loyal readers know, this tower has been on the FFLA radar since September of 2018 when I visited there with another FFLA member and 3 DEC staff to discuss restoring the tower. On that date the decision was to have an engineer inspect the tower and give a condition report to the DEC. Subsequently, the FFLA also submitted an application to the DEC to care for the tower and to develop a steward program there. Well here we are, nearly 6 years later and we are still awaiting that engineer's report. But the DEC does seem to have made some improvements, (cut out the view, built two parking lots, improved the road), at the location and the local Township has certainly made improvements to the road as well. Why make these improvements unless you were planning on restoring the tower? Investments such as these cost the taxpayers a lot of money and we sincerely hope that they will lead to the tower reopening to the public in the near future. As a P.S. to this – if the open area at the viewpoint were mowed, what a great place for a picnic table or two. We did enjoy our lunch there but had to stand in the tall grasses. The view was nice – you can see Utsayantha tower from there and the reservoir. The birds were singing and there were butterflies about and wildflowers. All bonuses when you visit this historic place. The DEC should move this tower restoration forward. Development of the location in partnership with the FFLA to mow, to get picnic tables up there, to get a kiosk up there are all possible.

**Makomis at Speculator:** We have 9 grandchildren and we introduce all of them to fire towers, both in backpacks when they are very small and on hikes as they are older. They all seem to love the hikes, the views, the snacks, the flora and fauna we see along the way, and to help out at these towers too. Many of the older ones have helped carry paint to cover graffiti and other supplies. Needing to resupply the Kane steward bag and hike the tools for the Snowy project, we enlisted the help of our grandson who had not yet visited the Makomis tower to help. We made the first two stops, then actually got to climb a fire tower! YEAH for him, but YEAH for me to actually climb a tower for the first time in months! It was great to have this option available for a person like me, recovering from a significant injury. The tower is great, the view is great, and fire tower information abounds at the kiosk at the base of the tower. Additionally, at the base of the tower is a beautiful nature trail complete with shady woods, sunny board walks, a wide variety of wild flowers, and stops at the river too! Thank you to the Village of Speculator for making this accessible tower happen!



### In Memoriam

I am sad to say a dear fire tower friend has passed, Tom Hayhurst. *“Tom was an avid and accomplished hiker and proud Adirondack (ADK) 46er. He was committed to sharing his love of the outdoors and trails with his family, friends, and the greater hiking community. This commitment included maintaining and preserving trails throughout the Adirondacks, including a role as the fire tower coordinator for the Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine. Thomas’s sense of humor, kindness, and passion for the Adirondacks will live on in the hearts and minds of those who knew him.”* Tom I hope you are enjoying the view and that there are no stinging nettles there. I will miss you.

<https://suncommunitynews.com/news/111095/thomas-m-hayhurst/>



Berry Hill Fire Tower made the Finger Lakes Trail news! Thanks for a nice article about the trail connections. To learn more about same, come to Bowman Lake State Park on Saturday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> to take part in a hike from the park, along the Finger Lakes Trail, to the Berry Hill Tower. There will be a slide show presentation at the park, about NY State Fire Tower history as well.

## HISTORY

As noted above with the report of wildland fire suppression training, extensive training has always been a part of a Forest Ranger's job. In his book, "The Forest Rangers, A History of the New York State Ranger Force", author and Retired Forest Ranger, Lou Curth talks about training on pages 2 through 6. He includes photographs of Rangers and helicopters and explains some of their uses in wildland firefighting, but there were other uses found for aviation and some continue today. Pest Control and Fish Stocking are such two uses.

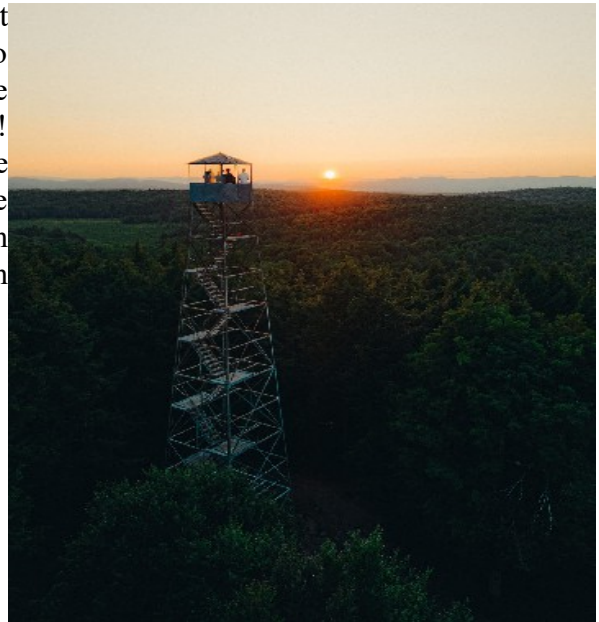
Pest Control: Quoting from a 1966 Conservationist article: "the Department purchased 2 Stearman biplanes from the Federal government as war surplus in 1946. The machines were modified for aerial spraying through the addition of a 180 gallon spray tank. These planes were "effective over large acreages of forest lands, applied at small dosages for the control of destructive forest insects. The Conservation Department has only recently added another machine to its spraying complement. This is a helicopter that is equipped for a payload of 200 gallons."

Fish Stocking: Both planes and helicopters have been used for fish stocking. A great, short video here of a helicopter stocking a lake. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/zPPC7-zkJLI>

Today's Forest Ranger has three major roles; Search and Rescue, Wildland Fire, and Public Land Protection. Training continues to be required for these roles. Aviation still plays a role. While aircraft are no longer part of the DEC inventory (rather they utilize private machines and have a great relationship with the NYS Police that meet their aviation needs) they are utilized often. Next month we will talk more about aviation and its use in Search and Rescue, which included roles for both Fire Tower Observers and Forest Rangers.



Our monthly photo contest was filled with excellent submissions! We ended up with a 3 way tie! We had to revote! In the end, Rocco Germani's photo of Spruce taken in July of 2023 won. Congratulations to Rocco! Rocco received the most votes on the second round of tie breaker voting. His photo is our new cover photo on the FFLA New York State Chapter Facebook page through August 10<sup>th</sup>. Thanks to everyone for participating! Such great photos are shared during this monthly contest!



## ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Wildfires are popping up all across the US. Conditions have been horrible to fight these fires, with triple digit temperatures and strong winds. Over 200,000 acres have burned in California alone and one person has died. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-07-12/first-wildfire-death-of-2024-season-reported-as-california-heat-wave-continues> Many different personnel and resources are utilized to battle these blazes and those in the backcountry often call for help from a select group of wildland firefighters. Our friends at National Woodland Owners Association give us a more in depth look at this special group: <https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/exploration-survival/wildland-firefighter-pack-test-fitness/>

## CALENDAR

**Thursday, July 25<sup>th</sup>:** 1:30 to 3:30 A nature walk to Buck Mt. Fire Tower with Ed Kanze sponsored by ADK Experience. Pre-registration is required. From atop the fire tower, take in stunning views of the William C. Whitney Wilderness Area and Little Tupper Lake. This trail gains 500 feet in elevation, mostly on the latter half of the hike. This outing is intended for folks seeking a moderate-to-challenging outdoor activity. Register at: <https://www.theadkx.org/event/nature-walks-buck/>

**August 14\*:** 7:00 P.M. At the Lake Pleasant Library 2864 NY-8, Speculator, NY 518-548-4411.  
Topic: The 115<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Fire Towers in the Adirondacks and Makomis & Hamilton Mt. Fire towers by M. Podskoch \*NOTE date change from August 13<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup>.

**August 17:** 1:00 P.M. Blenheim-Gilboa Visitors Center 1378 St Rt. 30 North Blenheim, NY.  
Topic: The 115<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Fire Towers in Adirondacks & Catskill Preserves by M. Podskoch.

**September 21 or 22:** Lyon Mt. Knowing that snow comes early to this spectacular mountain, we will try to get our fall trail work done before its arrival. We will choose the best weather day with the best views from these two days.

Happy Dog Days of Summer!

Laurie Laurie Rankin/Director/NYS Chapter/Forest Fire Lookout Association/[www.nysffla.org](http://www.nysffla.org)