



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
April 2025**

April showers have arrived and with them a decreased risk of wildfires. We may even see some of those May flowers showing themselves soon, but they will need to work their way through both old snow cover and new snowfall in many parts of the state.

AROUND THE STATE

From the March 25th Ranger Report: **Broome, Cayuga, Dutchess, Madison, Onondaga, Otsego, Steuben, Sullivan, and Wayne Counties Wildland Fires:** Between March 17th and 24th, Forest Rangers responded to 12 fires in nine counties across New York State. The fires burned more than 40 acres of land. The largest fire was in Butternuts, Otsego County, measuring 10.5 acres. The Otsego County wildland fire started on March 20th, and was declared out the following day. Eight of the 12 fires were caused by debris burning. DEC reminds New Yorkers that the [statewide brush burning ban](#) is in effect until May 14. Violators are subject to a minimum fine of \$500.

From the April 1st Ranger Report: **Chemung, Chenango, Orange, Saratoga, and Washington Counties Wildland Fires:** Between March 14th and 31st, Forest Rangers responded to fires in five counties across New York State. The fires burned 23 acres of land. The largest fire was in Catlin, Chemung County, measuring eight acres. This fire started on March 24th and was declared out the following day. Two of the five fires were caused by debris burning. DEC reminds New Yorkers that the [statewide brush burning ban](#) is in effect until May 14th.

Some DEC photos from the fires we discussed in last month's newsletter. Tuscarora, Amenia, and in the center background, the West Hampton Fires.



Bramley: They are going to make it official! The Bramley Mountain Fire Tower's official ribbon cutting will happen on Bramley's summit on Friday, May 2nd at 1:00 PM. Please join the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower, The New York City Department of Environmental Protection, Delaware County and other supporters for the grand re-opening of the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower. The organizations and the individuals who made the restoration of the tower possible will be recognized in a brief ceremony. After the ceremony, the cab of the tower will be open for visitors. We'll be there and hope you will be too! Have to miss it? Join us on Friday, June 20th when we will visit the tower as part of our Eastern Conference! Rain date is May 9th.

Overlook: I came across this really great blog post about Overlook Mountain, but it had one glaring inaccuracy – it referred to the Observer's cabin as the Ranger's cabin. When I reached out to the author – he immediately changed it and made it a much more accurate piece – thanks so much! A very in-depth look at the mountain, the tower, the Observer's cabin and the history. Well worth the read!
<https://scenesfromthetrail.com/2025/03/18/overlook-mountain-fire-tower-catskill-park/>

ADK Binghamton Chapter – On April 1st, I had a great evening at the ADK Binghamton Chapter monthly meeting. 25 or so turned out to hear about NYS Fire Towers: The past, the present and the future. Thanks for having me! Sorry, not many pictures as I was presenting.

Graham: Follow up from Steve Canfield, retired Observer at Graham Mountain Fire Tower regarding communication: “Very good point on communication in your article, when I manned Graham mountain fire tower many a day and night were spent in the tower on the radio and phone during wildfires relaying messages from ground crews, aircraft and the regional office in New Paltz.” Thanks for verifying this important role of Fire Tower Observers!

Cross River: We have received reports that there is activity on the site, though construction has not started yet.

Tower for Sale: From Dave Vana at Davana LLC comes word of a 100 foot tower on the ground in New York State looking for a home. Reach out to Dave if you are looking for one! Fire Tower Restoration 393 Fletcher Farm Road, Bloomingdale, New York 12913 518-354-0763 firetowerrestoration@gmail.com

Correction: Passed along to me by an anonymous follower was the fact that we may have had Observer Harriet Riga's name misspelled in last month's newsletter. As often occurred, various news resources spelled her name Rega and others Riga. We now believe the correct spelling was Rega.

Photo of the month: Congratulations goes to Debi Tebano for winning this month's Facebook photo contest! Debi's photo of her “second home” a.k.a. Kane Mt. Fire Tower gathered the most votes. Thanks to all for playing along!



AROUND THE COUNTRY

Team Rubicon: We have partnered with Team Rubicon in the past on three different projects: Sterling Forest, Jackie Jones, and Blue Mountain Lake Fire Towers. At our Eastern FFLA Conference in June, one of our guest speakers will be Paula Repka, Planning Specialist with Team Rubicon. Paula and fellow Team Rubicon members have responded to many disasters and many fire locations. Paula has been dispatched to several fire locations including the Altadena site, the Lahaina fire, and the Litton Fire in British Columbia in 2023. She will explain her role and experiences in those locations and what Team Rubicon can do not only in New York State but in other places across the US. In this powerful video, you will see Team Rubicon at the recent Altadena fire and a glimpse of Paula too!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aDyVvPvIPNs>

A very interesting but lengthy piece about human lookouts versus robots.
<https://thehotshotwakeup.substack.com/p/human-lookouts-vs-the-robots-a-35>

Our Western Chapter Director John Hearing had this to say about this podcast: “*Fire detection camera-based systems have a much higher false alarm rate; that at distances, humans are far more effective as spotting and reporting smokes in a timely manner; and there are other valuable advantages that human-staffed lookouts bring to the agencies, including interaction with the public, emergency response, radio message relay; and even the ability to put out small fires before crews would have to be dispatched. And human staffed lookouts don't come at a cost of \$40,000 - 60,000 per fire season. This doesn't mean cameras don't have a place in fire detection and reporting, but they are not the miracle answer that is sometimes advertised nor should they be considered a "replacement" for staffed fire lookouts, just another tool in the quiver.*”

Yes, we know all about the “other valuable advantages that human staffed lookouts bring to the agencies.” We knew about this back in 1989 – see our history section.

Fires have continued to be an issue in other parts of the US for a variety of reasons. In this informative article, “It’s not typical for conditions to be as dry as they have been the past couple of months,” Lauren Lowman, an associate professor in environmental engineering at Wake Forest University, told me. “Anything from a lightning strike to [a] power line sparking to someone deciding to burn leaves in their backyard and it is just sort of getting out of control can lead to a wildfire under those conditions.”
<https://www.wired.com/story/how-hurricanes-can-fuel-wildfires-in-the-southeast/>

HISTORY

This month I wanted to tip my hat to those Observers who found themselves out of work due to fire tower closures and cutbacks. I take most of this segment from the Governor's briefing, Forest Fire Tower / Observer Issue document dated 4-19-89 almost 36 years ago to the day.

Background: The Department has the responsibility to prevent, detect, and suppress forest fires. The Forest Ranger staff combined with a seasonal force of Forest Fire Observers has been the main line of defense against fires. Traditionally, fires have been detected by Rangers on routine patrols, by Observers in fire towers, by reconnaissance aircraft and by the general public.

The Department conducted a study in 1987 to ascertain the efficiency of these reporting techniques. It included the period 1982 thru 1986. The study found that statewide only 4% of fires were detected by Observers in fire towers, that's 99 fires out of the 2383 reported. The cost of the observer program exceeded \$225,000 annually, yet 96% of the fires were reported via other means.

Issue: The Department concluded the towers were no longer effective and phased them out of service. The 1989 plans call for staffing 6-8 of the 31 towers staffed in 1988.

Response: This is not a reduction in the State's commitment to combat forest fires. It is a logical reassignment of resources.

On May 22, 1989 Carl Wiedmann, Regional Forestry Manager Region 4 provided a memorandum in response and suggests that *“It is unfortunate that the briefing does not adequately discuss the issues involved in closing towers. The paper justifies closings with an annual savings of \$225,000.00. However, there are several things left completely out of the discussion.”*

“No mention was made of the following:

-the value of towers and Observers for communication in locations where radio contact is not possible

-the value of towers and Observers in public relations

-the value of towers and Observers in maintaining an official presence which discourages vandalism and abuse of state land.

-the value of towers and Observers for public safety in the interior.

-the value of Observers who frequently serve as Assistant Forest Rangers when fire danger is low.

“I don't argue that budget cuts may be necessary. But I do feel it is important to provide a full discussion of the issues and trade-offs.”

Mr. Wiedemann concluded by saying *“Several years ago, we were very unhappy with a decision to terminate 50% of our Ranger force based on a rather simplistic analysis. The proposal might never had been made if the Division of Budget really understood what Forest Rangers do. Along these same lines, I hope we have fully explained the values of towers and Observers to those who are decision makers relative to this budget cut.”*

I would suggest that there was a human issue involved here, the loss of jobs. I would also suggest that we can learn from our mistakes. The podcast mentioned above shows that we may not have as we continue to attempt to eliminate humans in fire detection and we continue to see that they are still accurate and useful in fire detection and other duties.

KANE MT. FIRE TOWER TURNS 100

100 Years on Top – that is the name of the new exhibit at the Caroga Historical Museum that will be unveiled as the kick off to the Centennial Celebration! I have had a sneak preview – it's awesome!

Thursday Evening July 31st from 7 to 9 PM the Caroga Historical Association and Museum will host a gallery opening *“100 Years on Top: The Kane Mountain Fire Tower.”* This will be the first public display of panels detailing the history of the fire tower. A reception will be held with dignitaries to commemorate the occasion along with refreshments.

Much work continues to be done behind the scenes in planning this event and others. Keep up to date on these events as they are firmed up by visiting https://www.carogamuseum.org/?page_id=4849 Did you check out the map puzzle that is there? Wasn't that fun?

The NYS Chapter of the FFLA will be hosting a 'Desserts and Diaries' presentation with retired Forest Rangers and Observers sharing their memories over birthday cake and coffee on Saturday August 16th from 3 to 5 PM at the Caroga Lake Fire Department. We will have stewards at the tower during all 4 days of the events. Be sure to save the dates on your calendar. More in upcoming newsletters.

CALENDAR

April 19: Earth Day event at Watertown Zoo – Thompson Park Tower -

<https://tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/event/zoo-new-york-earth-day-celebration/>

April 22: Wheelerville School Presentation

May 2: Ribbon Cutting at Bramley Mt. Fire Tower

May 3: 1:30 PM Association of Public Historians of NYS Region 7 covering fire towers of Fulton, Herkimer, Oneida, Montgomery, Otsego, and Schoharie Counties. Presentation held at the Worcester Historical Society Museum – 144 Main St. Worcester.

May 17: Mt. Adams Spring Trail Sweep and Tower Maintenance: admin@adkhighpeaks.org to sign up

May 22: Wheelerville School Trip to Kane Mt. Fire Tower

May 29: Northville School Presentation

May 30, 31: Work at Belfry Mt. Fire Tower

June 14: Get Outdoors Day at Lowville Demonstration Area

June 20 - 22: FFLA Eastern Conference in Richmondville, NY

June 29, 30: Lyon Mt. Trail Work – Note tentative dates

July 10, 11: Work at Owls Head Fire Tower - Note tentative dates

July 12, 13: Adirondack 46ers will be working on the Poke O Moonshine Trail adk46er.org/trailcrew

July 19: Presentation at Bowman Lake State Park

August 14 - 17: Kane Fire Tower Centennial in Caroga Lake

August 30: Annual Lighting Event 8:30 PM to 9:30 PM

Sept. 18, 19: Spruce Fire Tower Work – Note this is a date change

Sept 20, 21: Lyon Mt. Trail Work – Note tentative dates

Oct 3: Berry Hill Astronomy program

Oct 4: Berry Hill Astronomy program - rain date

Oct. 5: FFLA Volunteer Appreciation Picnic – location to be determined.

STEWARDSHIP

Dickinson Hill – On April 6th we held the first of two orientation sessions for stewards at this tower. We had a nice turn out with 9 stewards taking part; Allison, Adam, Chris, Mike, Bill, Carol, Amelia, and Robbie. The rain let up just in time for our hike to the tower following our morning training inside. Lots of recognition points were earned!

Thanks so much to all of you! You will be making a difference to the visitors you meet and the tower itself!



Berry Hill – No new stewards attended our April 13th orientation. We were disappointed and also disappointed to see that the Chenango Hiking Challenge does not include the tower this year. We do however have some wonderful veteran stewards who are filling in the steward schedule for the season. We also got some great news from the DEC that they are working toward completing a few items to make the facility more accessible and to meet the criteria to add it to the Accessible website.

We have a few more steward trainings coming up. If you would like to take part in our rewarding volunteer steward program, we would love to have you!

April 26: Dickinson Hill 10 AM Visitors Center

May 3: Bramley Fire Tower 9 AM U.M. Church Delhi May 4: Balsam Lake 10 AM Millbrook TH

June 7: Stillwater 10 AM Boat Launch June 14: Kane 10 AM Town Hall

2025 EASTERN CONFERENCE

We are looking forward to seeing many of you at our Eastern Conference June 20th and 21st. You can register on line at <https://firelookout.org/events/>. We would like to have you join us for the events at the Richmondville Fire Hall, and to visit several fire towers, including a couple of private towers that we have permission to visit. We are getting some great items for our silent auction and we have a line up of great speakers.

Finally, I have to share a couple of feel good stories. One is a historical 1940's love story that will warm your heart. It clearly describes the war time mood of the country, the work ethic, the development of friendship and more. It really is worth your time to read. <https://www.mtoutlaw.com/fiction-blazing-hearts-on-rampage-mountain/>

The other story relates the journey of Fire Tower Man Dixon R. Miller age 91. His devotion to his work, to his tower, and to his community is tremendous. Enjoy the story of what he has done and continues to do at Pohopoco Fire Tower in Pennsylvania, overlooking the Pocono landscape. <https://www.timesleader.com/archive/1019976/still-at-top-of-his-game-dixon-miller-91-has-best-highest-seat-to-keep-eye-on-the-forest>

Enjoy those spring wildflowers as they begin to show themselves.

Laurie

Laurie Rankin, Director
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Forest Fire Lookout Association
www.nysffla.org

Visits this month: Dickinson Hill, Bramley