



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

March is such a mixture of things in New York; there are still full-on winter conditions in many parts of the state, in some parts winter has disappeared and things are drying out causing spring fire season to ramp up, streams are opening up, and the opening of trout fishing will soon be upon us. Historically, it was also the time of year to open fire towers for the season. They often opened from south to north as snow melted. In this month's photo contest winner, we can see that most of the snow was gone from Balsam Lake Mt. summit in the spring of 2020. The picnic table was visible, and in the valleys the Covid pandemic was causing shut downs. By April, towers were closed across the state. But here we are, in 2025 with our towers reopened and we sincerely hope, the pandemic is a thing of the past. Many congratulations to Debi Tebano for being the winner with this lovely photograph and a reminder that we can persevere and overcome a great deal! Thanks to all who took part in the photo contest.



SPRING WILDFIRE SEASON IN THE EAST

While we have become all too familiar with the significant fires in the western United State the last few years, the eastern US has shown that it is not immune to these fires either. Below are some links to wildfires that have been fueled by dry conditions and strong winds across the east.

South Carolina: <https://www.wyff4.com/article/myrtle-beach-woman-arrested-carolina-forest-wildfire/64088648>

North Carolina and Georgia: <https://www.wired.com/story/the-extreme-weather-conditions-that-drove-the-carolina-wildfires/>

New Jersey: <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/2025/03/04/nj-forest-fire-service-preps-spring-wildfire-season-2025/81165363007/>

Not specific to the northeastern US is this thought provoking article about the history of wildfires: https://phys.org/news/2025-02-tree-scars-forest-north-america.html#google_vignette

AROUND THE STATE

The Statewide Burn Ban started March 16 and goes through May 14th.
<https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/air-quality/open-burning>

We had some interesting fires pop up in Long Island before the burn ban:
<https://longisland.news12.com/officials-crews-work-to-put-out-hot-spots-in-eastern-long-island-fires-arson-investigation-begins>

This upcoming discussion of the history of eastern fires is one I plan to attend later this week. You can attend in person or online. The subject is one which we will be discussing at our Eastern Conference in June. <https://albanypinebush.org/index.php?section=visit-calendar&evtid=1891>

2-19 Ranger Report: Town of Denning Ulster County Wilderness Search: On Feb. 16 at 2:15 PM, Forest Ranger Martin responded to a radio call for a no-voice 911 call from Red Hill Road. Ranger Martin checked the access point for Red Hill fire tower and located a car parked on Denning Road. Ranger Schweider hiked up the Old Dinch Road access point while Ranger Martin hiked up from Denning Road. At 3 PM, Ranger Martin located the hikers from New York City returning to the parking area on the blue trail. They had called 911 because they were concerned about the weather and getting frostbite since they were not wearing proper winter gear. When the 911 call didn't go through, they continued hiking down to their car.

Cat Mt. Fire Tower: Another excellent paper by author John Sasso. Thanks so much John! *“Cat Mt: Just south of Cranberry Lake lies Cat Mountain, a 2,262-foot peak that was once home to a fire tower. The summit is reachable via an easy climb up a 0.7-mile spur of the Cranberry Lake 50 trail, which can be reached after a six-mile hike from Wanakena after crossing Janacks Landing. This historical profile delves into the history tied to Cat Mountain, including the use by the State for fire observation, the legacies of several people tied to the peak, and its inclusion into the Forest Preserve.”*
<https://drive.google.com/.../1SSj8LCgTJHXVkJSmGjHD.../view...>

Salmon Lake Fire Tower: Interesting news. How might it affect the Salmon Lake Fire Tower?
<https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/late-john-hendrickson-leaves-long-lake-as-sole-beneficiary-of-whitney-park-sale-proceeds>

Buck Mt Fire Tower: Based on the news above and the monies that will come to the Town of Long Lake, there should be plenty of funds to keep the trail to Buck Mt in great shape in the future as well as the tower!

New DEC Commissioner: The Governor has announced her choice for a new DEC Commissioner. Let's hope there will be some solid leadership from her if she is approved by the legislator.
<https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/stories/wind-energy-advocate-named-to-lead-new-york-environmental-agency>

Communication: I came across this podcast about communication in the Catskills. It is an in depth discussion that opens with the lack of communication during the Whitehouse Fire. Many areas of the Catskills are part of our Forever Wild lands and continue to lack opportunities for communication towers to be built. Another large landowner is the New York City Department of Environmental Protection. As you listen to the podcast, you will hear discussions about the future of communications in the area. Do you think the situation would have differed if the nearby Red Hill Fire Tower was manned in terms of providing communication? Rock Rift, Balsam Lake, Bramley, Utsayantha, Hunter, Overlook, and Tremper, towers all oversee NYC DEP lands. As this project is explored, we should see fire towers included in the discussions. We also wish to note the support the NYC DEP has provided for the Bramley Mt. Fire Tower and Rock Rift projects that are on their properties. Trails to the properties and trailhead parking lots are also on DEP lands. <https://www.kaatscast.com/wireless-watershed-nycs-initiative-to-connect-the-catskills/>

Balsam Lake: Finally, DEC is taking some action since the 2019 Observers Cabin Building Code Violation was issued! Bids were sought for an engineering firm to do an “evaluation” and there was one bid, which was approved by Central Office. Now we have to wait for the purchase order, then the evaluation and then the report. It is not expected that there will be any actual work taking place in 2025, but plans do appear to be coming together at last. We have requested emergency stabilization be done on several occasions pending the work, but no plan is in place at this time for that.

ADK History Museum: “Did you know that over 800,000 acres of Adirondack forests were set ablaze in devastating firestorms from 1903 to 1913? Check out our latest blog, which covers the unfortunate circumstances leading up to these disastrous events. <https://www.adkhistorycenter.org/post/fires-of-the-high-peaks?> This blog is based on our "Fires of the High Peaks" permanent exhibit.

Fall 2024 Wildfires: We will hear more about this at the Eastern Conference in 2025 when a NYS DEC Forest Ranger will be presenting. At about 44 minutes during this podcast you will hear discussions begin on the wildfires. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-158-rangers-rusher-and-horn-part-2-wildfires/id1582738558?i=1000691077399>

RECOGNITION – SAVE THE DATE



Recognition - We are an all volunteer organization and we need all kinds of assistance, those who can run the drill and those who can run the meeting, those who can carry an item up a trail, and those who can bake the best cookies. Everyone can play a role. What can you do to help us out? Simply let us know what you love to do or what you have skills for and we will do our best to find a role that fits you! Recognizing each of volunteers is something that we always do as you are the ones who make it all happen! To that end, we have developed our recognition patch and we plan to hold a picnic on Sunday, October 5th to hand out patches and honor all of our volunteers!

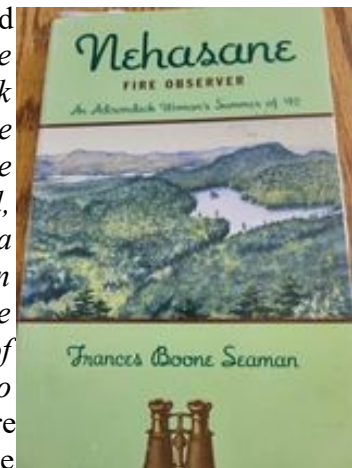
HISTORY

March is Women's history month. Many women served as Observers in New York State and some books and news articles have been written about and by those women Observers. This month we will feature Observers Harriet Riga and Frances Boone.

Harriet Riga, who in 1935 was touted as the state's only female Observer was written about extensively for her work at Bald (Rondaxe) Fire Tower. That year to showcase how well Harriet did her job, a competition was put in place. From the Utica Daily Press June 25th, 1935 we read *“Harriet Riga, forest fire observer is looking forward to playing a dramatic role here next month when a miniature forest, crowning a high knoll overlooking the Fulton Chain of Lakes will be set afire in the presence of the Conservation Commissioner and his staff.....in excess of 2000 trees.....Miss Riga will give the alarm to a cospse of Forest Rangers and fire wardens who in turn will rush into the conflagration with modern forest fire fighting equipment and extinguish the flames. The fire will start upon signal by Commissioner Osborne who will also time the period lapsing before the sound of the siren indicates the billowing smoke has been sighted by Miss Riga on the Bald Mt. Tower 7 miles away.”* What a job evaluation that must have been! Harriet would go on to serve at other fire towers, including 6 years at Mt. Electra where another female Observer served. Many thanks to Allen Farber who compiled the list of Riga articles and shared them with me.



Frances Boone's time as a fire tower Observer at Mount Electra surprised some: *“ One day early in the summer of 1942, Bill Touhey, on duty in the Salmon Lake Mountain fire tower in Whitney Park west of Long Lake, took a phone call from the observer on Mount Electra, not far away in Nehasane Park. A stereotype of the gruff old Adirondacker, he was perhaps a bit more gruff than usual in his response. After a startled silence, he growled, 'Well, I'll be!' The voice was that of a young woman's.”* *“How did it happen that a woman would take a summer job as a fire observer, one of very few women to hold such a post in the roughly 75-year heyday of the towers? For one thing, most available men were involved in World War II. It was the era of Rosie the Riveter, a period that scholars now think gave the real impetus to the women's rights movement that blossomed decades later.”* More information on France's work and the book she subsequently wrote can be found here: https://www.adirondackexplorer.org/book_reviews/nehasne-fire-observer



STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship means many things, such as taking care of our natural environment and all that is in that environment. Historically, our Forest Rangers and Observers played a vital role in protecting the environment. From retired Forest Ranger Gary Lee comes this memory: *“Years ago, now we had a Northern Saw Whet Owl spend the winter around our feeder at the Forest Ranger Headquarters. We would see it dive down in the light outside of the living room window and catch some little critters under the feeders. There were some flying squirrels using the feeders at night and I'm sure he got a couple of them. I was also feeding the deer and one night we came home from a basketball game and the garage door was open and when I pulled the car in there was the little owl sitting on the grain bags watching for mice, that I'm sure were getting their supper there and so was he by catching them. I did get a photo of the owl before he flew out of the garage.”*



Gary recently had a visit from a similar owl and shared this photograph and the Forest Rangers of today continue to protect our natural environment.

The NYS Chapter provides stewardship protection in numerous ways, from the actual physical care of a tower and a tower trail, to sharing the history of towers so that the public continues to care for these historic and special places, and through education in our steward programs. Each year we provide orientation training sessions for volunteers who generously give of their time to volunteer as tower stewards. Some have asked if they can attend any orientation session and steward at any tower. The answer is no. Each tower is unique in its trails, local towns, forest that it sees, places where materials are stored for the program, parking, and more. Thus, no one program is exactly the same as another. Would you like to be a steward in 2025? Stewarding Orientation Sessions are scheduled for the following dates, times, and locations. If you are interested, please let me know. If no one has registered for a session, or if a session needs to be cancelled for a particular reason, we need to have contact information for those in attendance so we can notify them of same. We need to have proper uniform sizes available, and enough materials for stewards, so please register! Remember you get a point for attending the orientation session and a point for every day you steward after that towards a recognition patch. [Email to get involved](#)

April 6: Dickinson Hill 10 AM Visitors Center
April 26: Dickinson Hill 10 AM Visitors Center
May 3: Bramley Fire Tower 9 AM U.M. Church Delhi
June 7: Stillwater 10 AM Boat Launch

April 13: Berry Hill 10 AM at Tower
April 27: Kane 10 AM at Town Hall
May 4: Balsam Lake 10 AM Millbrook Th
June 14: Kane 10 AM Town Hall

KANE MT. FIRE TOWER TURNS 100

Much work is being done behind the scenes in planning the Centennial Events in Caroga Lake that will celebrate the Kane Mt. Fire Tower turning 100 in 2025!! A sneak preview at the line up of activities includes events happening from Thursday, August 14th when our future, the children of the Town of Caroga Summer Program will lead us off by spending the day immersed in fun activities and learning all about the Kane Mt. Fire Tower. The NYS FFLA Chapter will be leading those activities along with the Town. That evening, a fire tower presentation by author Marty Podskoch presented by the Caroga Historical Museum at the Caroga Lakes Arts Collective will occur. The museum is busy on many fronts as they prepare for the centennial, including the development of a website dedicated to Kane. <https://www.carogamuseum.org/> Credit for the background drone view of the Tower goes to Nick Gale. A ton of work has gone into this website and it contains some really great information and some fun things too! The Caroga Historical Museum has created a virtual jigsaw puzzle replica of the fire tower map for you to do! [A link to the fire tower jigsaw puzzle](#). If you are using it with younger kids, be aware that you can adjust the puzzle to be fewer pieces. You just need to click on the square on the left of the central bar. More on the plans in upcoming newsletters – it will be a fun celebration! During all 4 days, the Caroga Historical Museum will be open with some very interesting exhibits being developed about the fire tower. Saturday, along with other events, the NYS Chapter of the FFLA will be hosting a 'Desserts and Diaries' presentation with retired Forest Rangers and Observers sharing their memories over cake and coffee. Be sure to save the date(s) on your calendar. More in upcoming newsletters.

CALENDAR

Our calendar is bursting with options for you to participate in!

- April 1:** ADK Binghamton Chapter Programming <https://tughilltomorrowlandtrust.org/event/zoo-new-york-earth-day-celebration/>
- 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:** 5-3-25: 1:30pm 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 and 31:** Work at Belfry Mt. Fire Tower
- June 14:** Get Outdoors Day at Lowville Demonstration Area
- June 20, 21, and 22:** FFLA Eastern Conference in Richmondville, NY
- June 29, 30:** Lyon Mt. Trail Work – Note tentative dates
- July 10 and 11:** Work at Owls Head Fire Tower - Note tentative dates
- July 19:** Presentation at Bowman Lake State Park
- August 7, 8, and 9:** Trail Work at Spruce Fire Tower – Note these are tentative dates
- August 14, 15, 16, and 17:** Kane Fire Tower Centennial in Caroga Lake
- August 30:** Annual Lighting Event 8:30 to 9:30
- Sept 20 and 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.

Unless otherwise noted, for all of the above contact Laurie Rankin [to get involved](#).

Please keep an eye on the calendar on our website, as we will be finalizing work projects dates soon. We hope you can plan on helping out at one or more. We will plan work projects on weekdays and weekends if possible so that everyone can get involved in a project. Thanks for considering!

<https://nysffla.org/calendar.html>

Springing ahead you can see we will have a very busy 2025 season planned for all of you. We look forward to seeing you!

Laurie

PS - For those who would like to register for our 2025 Eastern Conference, the registration is now up on line: Scroll to the bottom of the page for all of the information and registration form or you can pay directly on line. <https://firelookout.org/events/>