



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
November 2019**

November is a month for change in New York. We can have gorgeous Indian Summer weather or we can have a blanket of snow and cold air that stays until spring. One creates severe fire conditions which we hope no flames will find and the other makes us place another log on the fire to fan the flames. This year seems to be a bit of both for November. But what about your job changing? We must remember that Observer's work generally ended in New York around November 1st and other employment had to be found. The November elections certainly played a major role in employment as the Observer's position was an appointed one. I often think of the Observer closing up the tower for the season, and as they walked the trail one last time for the year, they must have wondered if they would be re-hired in the spring or relieved from duty. Recently this article from the Catskill Mt News was given to me, dated May 15, 1915. It illustrates how appointments were announced.

“Forest Rangers Politics Makes Quite a Shake Up in this Section' - The following appointments have been announced at Albany. Delaware County – District Ranger Stratton D. Todd, Seager, vice, J. J. McGrath, Phoenicia, effective as of May first. Rangers, Emery Jenkins, Union Grove. Mountain Observer, Twadell mountain Alfred Waterman, East Branch.

Ulster County – Forest Ranger Jay H. Simpson, Phoenicia. Mountain Observers Balsam Lake Mountain Douglass C. Owen, Hardenburgh; Belleyare mountain Charles Y. Persons, Pine Hill; High Point Mountain William H. Bradford, Ellenville.

The following Forest Rangers were relieved from duty, effective as of May 1: Alfred Bell, Arkville, Wm Burns, Sastorland; Robert Cunningham, Warrensburg; J. L. Leavitt, Russell; Peter O'Malley, Bloomingdale; Charles A Williams, Hope, and Frank Owens, Horicon.

The resignation of Daniel L Cunningham of Long Lake as Forest Ranger was accepted.”

Halloween Storm Updates: Due to significant rainfall in a short period of time, several fire tower access roads were damaged or remain closed. Please check back for updates before visiting Snowy (State Route 30 closed), Pillsbury (Perkins Clearing Road Closed), and Hadley (Tower Hill Road is closed from the Eddy Road intersection to the Hadley Mountain Trailhead due to extensive washout. Hadley Mountain can be accessed from Hadley Hill Road). I will update as I receive additional information. If you know of any other damage to roads or trails, please let me know so I can share the information with everyone.

Hunting Season Closures: Stillwater and Spruce Mountains have hunting season closures in effect. Remember to check the dates for when these two fire towers will reopen.

California Wildfires in the News again. There are numerous articles, evening news pieces, politics and money involved in the most recent fires. Thoughts and prayers to all who are fighting these fires. This particular article adds a bit of humanity to what must be a difficult way to live with the constant threat of fire: <https://www.marketwatch.com>

Around the State

Sterling Forest Fire Tower: A big shout out of thanks to the Friends of Sterling Forest for all of the work that went into their second year of volunteering. We thank the Park for all of their support, the individual volunteers, and the ADK NJ-Ramapo Chapter for their donation. Here is the report from Susan Serico who deserves a HUGE THANK YOU for her work at the helm. The program was open for 40 days or 160 hours. They greeted 889 visitors with 11 volunteers. Work accomplishments included new windows for the fire tower cab that were built and installed by Park staff. The window project was funded by the ADK North Ramapo Chapter. Trees and brush were cleared around the tower and the Observers cabin by volunteers and park staff. The Observers Cabin deck was stained by a volunteer. The group participated in the Lighting of the fire towers and Smokey's Birthday events.

Cathead: From the Adirondack Council State of the Park 2019-2020 comes the following - "Officials in Hamilton County continued to press for a Constitutional Amendment to construct a road and install a power line across a section of the Silver Lake Wilderness Area for new county emergency communications tower. The council supports the effort to improve emergency communications using on-site power, negating the need for an amendment. The tower could be located on the private summit of Cathead Mountain. The State Police already operate an emergency tower there, with on-site wind, solar energy, and backup generator, with no road or power line. Complicating matters, a private hunting club that owns the summit where the tower would be built wants a road for motorized access to its private property. Club owners purchased the land knowing it had no such access. An amendment would bring new traffic to the Wilderness area's interior, which is in conflict with plans to protect the area as motor-free." We applaud the NYSDEC for continuing to work with the property owners and emergency services to find a compromise that suits all, including public access to the fire tower.

Catskill Fire Tower Passport: Fire Tower Passport Winners: Morgan Outdoors of Livingston Manor is an ongoing supporter of the Catskill Fire Towers. They support us in many ways including offering their space free of charge for programs such as the Balsam Lake Fire Tower Centennial Events. For the 11th year, they have offered a Fire Tower Passport for those who visit all 5 fire towers. They drew three winning entries and the winners are . . . drum roll: Kristen Nelson, Monticello, NY won an Osprey Daylite pack; Brendan Moore, Wurtsboro, NY won Darn Tough VT socks; and Kathryn Rodgers, Rockaway Beach, NY won a solar-powered Luci light.

Stillwater: The trailhead has new DEC signage that includes the dates of closure! The closure from the second Tuesday in October to December 20th is clearly posted on the sign so all visitors will know. Thank you!

Poke O Moonshine: Fall Trail work day on Saturday the 2nd of November included raking and cleaning out all of the water bars on the Observers' Trail, just after the big storm. Thank you for your work!

Hadley: The Friends of Hadley held their fall work day on October 20th. They cleaned and repaired all of the water bars. Thanks to volunteers Steve, Licia, Matt, Judd and Jackie for helping out.

Makomis: Remember we discussed the old / new tower in our September newsletter? Owner Mike Vigeli has completed the restoration of the fire tower and also tracked down the folks who removed it from the summit. A great news article about all the happenings can be found here: <https://www.suncommunitynews.com/articles/the-sun/makomis-fire-tower-found-and-restored>

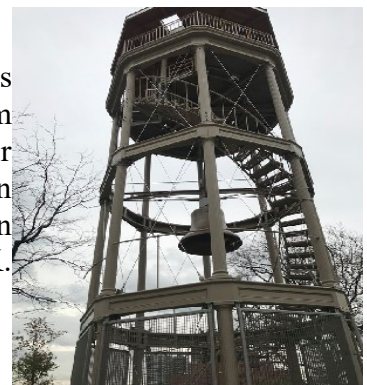
Upper Esopus Fire Tower: I was asked to do a presentation for the Catskill Mountain Kids program at the Catskill Visitor Center on November 9th. This program was for children from 4 years to 10 years old. The focus was to be fire safety, fire building, and fire towers with a visit to the new tower. As it turned out only one 4 year old attended. But we made sure Eli had lots of information and we all got to visit the cab of the new tower. The view does include Ashokan High Point and Mt. Tremper (though the fire tower there is not visible). Best of all for Eli, we got to see a John Deere tractor from there! We are always happy to get tomorrow's caretakers involved at an early age. The tower cab is now closed until spring, but one can still climb the tower.

Ward Pound Ridge: A fire tower once stood on this Westchester County ridge line. An effort to return a fire tower to this location (the original is no longer available) is underway with lots of local support. <http://westchester.news12.com/story/41244751/state-grants-dollar100k-to-build-new-fire-tower-at-ward-pound-ridge-reservation>

Rescues: Another rescue, this one involving a difficult carry out. From the Ranger Report - "On Oct. 20 at 3:14 PM, DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from a hiker on St. Regis Mountain reporting an injured hiker. The injured 18-year-old male from Alfred Station, New York, was less than a mile from the St. Regis summit with an unstable lower leg injury. The hiker reported that he had tripped over tree roots and heard a snap in his ankle. Six Forest Rangers responded and were assisted by members of Search and Rescue of the Northern Adirondacks (SARNAK) and the Paul Smiths - Gabriels Volunteer Fire Department. Due to steep terrain and the length of the trail, a nearby camp agreed to give rescuers access to their property to reach the injured hiker's location and evacuate him via an old fire road. The first Ranger reached the injured hiker at 6:20 PM. Upon assessment of the injury, the subject's leg was splinted, and the hiker was packaged into a litter and carried down with backpack carriers. Once off the steep slope, the litter was attached to a wheel and brought back via the access road. The hiker was then transported via Ranger vehicle off private property to the trailhead at 7:54 PM. Saranac Lake Rescue transported the subject to a local hospital."

Tooley Pond Fire Tower: While the fire tower has been moved to the Ranger School, the original site is still on state land and has a foot trail to it. There was no mention of the fire tower at the trailhead kiosk. As resources are squeezed and the NYSDEC has less money and fewer personnel, it is easy for some things to be forgotten about such as our history. One FFLA member, Bill wanted to be sure that did not happen. He took action. He put together information about the historic tower and advocated for the NYSDEC to include it at the kiosk. They did! Thank you Bill Hill! This is an excellent example of how one person can make a difference. Bill has not stopped there either. He has approached the local township about the possibility of putting up a historical marker on the roadside near the site. Discussions continue.

Mount Morris Tower at Marcus Garvey Park: These are some pictures of the newly reopened fire watchtower in Marcus Garvey Park in Harlem and graciously provided by Jim K. Unfortunately the tower wasn't open for climbing, but we are pleased to see the restoration project has been completed. Jim says "It is quite something. Set atop a massive rock right in the center of an urban park, photo courtesy of Jim K. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/25/nyregion/harlem-fire-watchtower-nyc.html>

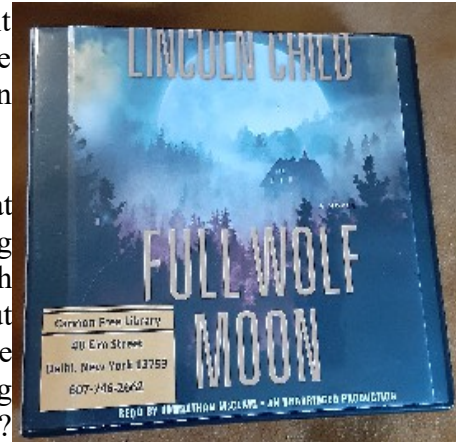


Trivia Question for November: What is the height of the highest standing publicly accessible tower in NYS? A Centennial Patch for the winner!

Trivia Winner for October: Our question was Who was Kinnie Williams? Among other things he was the Superintendent of Forest Fire Control for the Conservation Department. You will see his name in our history often. We did have a Trivia question winner, Lori Ann who got a Centennial Patch for her answer!

Mount Adams: After seeing photos posted on social media sites of apparent damage to the bridge over the Hudson en route to Mount Adams, Chair Jack Coleman gave a shout out to have volunteers come look at the trail, clear any blow down and check on the tower on 11-9. Three strong volunteers, John, Ken and Lori Ann joined Jack. All stepped up and got the job done. Trail clearing occurred and they found the fire tower in great shape!

Book of the month: Full Wolf Moon by Lincoln Child – a bit legend, a bit science fiction, but it does contain 2 fire towers in the Adirondacks where this book is set. A lot of creative license has been taken with the book, but I love the inclusion of fire towers!



Holiday shopping: What is the perfect stocking stuffer? A fire tower patch of course! How about supporting your favorite fire tower by purchasing their patch, t-shirt or cap?

The Balsam Lake Fire Tower Centennial Patch is still available and the special holiday price is only \$4.00 while supplies last! We do ask you send a SASE with your purchase. Let's make the NYS Centennial Patch on sale for \$4.00 as well. Prices in effect through 12-20-19.

Editorial Comments/Feedback: I thank all of the persons who sent very thoughtful feedback regarding the editorial in last month's newsletter. In case you missed it, the editorial was regarding the impact of all of the hiking challenges on our towers and trails. It was interesting to note that just a week ago, the Governor admitted that the increase in visitors to the Adirondacks High Peaks and subsequent impacts may be due in part to all of the money NYS has spent on tourism. Solutions were not mentioned. <https://www.adirondackdailyenterprise.com/news/local-news/2019/11/cuomo-high-peaks-overuse-legitimate-issue/>

I have included as many comments as space allows.

From BT: "Every person that visits a fire tower could become a person that "supports" fire towers. The problem isn't the number of persons visiting. The problem, or challenge, is the conversion of these visitors into supporters that would provide financial support, labor and/or political support. I believe the problem of conversion of visitors to supporters may be internal (providing a welcoming opportunity) not external (visitors don't want to)."

From SC: "I agree with your assessment of the over use of the towers and trails. With the fire tower challenge on the third weekend of August I was at Hunter and had 208 people sign in and another 50 or so who didn't. It was very, very busy and I spent the day at the base keeping count so only 6 persons go up at a time. The Becker Hollow trail is almost impassable as it is being overused to get to Hunter."

The ADK Glens Falls-Saratoga Chapter tells me they have donated annually, between \$75 and \$500, mainly to Hadley Mt Fire Tower Committee since the challenge began. This year they donated \$150 to Hadley. Exact details regarding amounts, years, and towers were not given except for 2019. Their web page states they donate to Poke O, Hadley, Vanderwhacker, and Spruce fire towers. There is no grant application, criteria, deadlines, etc. If you are interested in receiving a donation from this group, you should simply contact the Chapter. firetower@adk-gfs.org

From DF: “They are a double edged sword; on the plus side they encourage people to get outside and enjoy the environment which may lead to stewardship and support of wild lands. On the other side, the impact of so many people on the trails and in the parking areas is easily noticed. The obvious missing piece is that most of the challenges do not contain any stewardship components. The lack of stewardship in these challenges became obvious to me in the first month of the Saranac 6'er program. I was a strong supporter of that challenge before it even began. Being on the trails often that season, I quickly noticed the impact. One year the 6'er organized a trails day program but they didn't follow through with it in subsequent years. Instead now the 6'er and the Tupper Lake Triad hold trail runner events that create even more impact. I have pondered how the lack of stewardship could be turned around. In reading your newsletter, I think there may actually be an opportunity for the organizers of the challenges to pitch in. The hikeSafe program looks like it has some real potential. All of the challenge programs should be able to share this on their websites and social media. In addition if there are cards or hang tags listing the six steps available they could easily distribute them at events and include them in mailing out their stickers, patches, and pins. Knowing the cost to have patches and stickers produced, I think all of the challenge groups should have some funding available to cover the costs. I will pursue becoming a hikeSafe Cooperator and make the cards available through our normal channels.”

From JS: “I thought your opening comments laid out the good news / bad news situation of the Catskill Fire Tower Challenge in a perfect way! With one exception: One "up side" that actually HAS occurred is that along with visits, donations are up and I expect at the other towers too.”

From BF: “I agree the number of visitors is a real problem at many towers, an example of high use on many public lands. It seems like the various hiking challenges contribute to heavy use, especially when combined with social media. In fact, I wonder if the latter may be a more significant driver of increased use. The towers themselves are pretty durable, so I'm more concerned about the impact of heavy use on the trailheads, trails and summits. (But I do wish people would be more mindful of the damage their microspikes can inflict on stair treads and landings when they climb in the winter.) There's a lot of interest these days in addressing high-use impacts in the High Peaks, but I don't hear as much about other parts of the Adirondacks, including the fire tower summits. Getting this issue into the public debate may be a role FFLA could play. In addition to the negative impacts on natural resources, trails and other infrastructure, tower stewards and volunteer workers, the increased use can also degrade the visitor experience. Who wants to have to queue up on the trail or to climb the tower? I've done both on days that I didn't expect there to be a lot of people. That said, there have been days when we didn't see anyone. All of the hiking challenges you mentioned in your piece, with the exception of the ADK challenge, are sponsored and promoted by agencies or organizations promoting tourism in their area. They can't be faulted for doing that. But, they may not understand the impact these promotions have on natural resources. Do these organizations provide financial or other support to maintain the trails and structures and staff the more popular towers? Might there be an opportunity for FFLA or the friends groups to engage these folks?”

From our April 2018 Newsletter - The double edged sword of challenges and their popularity:

Many of you, particularly in the Adirondacks are seeing the emergence of hiking challenges that include hikes to your fire tower. A few examples are The Tupper Lake Triad, The Fulton Chain Trifecta, The Adirondack Mountain Club's Fire Tower Challenge and Winter Fire Tower Challenge, The Moriah Challenge and The Saranac 6'er. On the one hand, this increase in visitors can offer you an opportunity to showcase your fire tower, recruit new volunteers, and increase donations. On the other hand, these challenges encourage more and more visitors which means more wear and tear on the fire tower, the cabins, privies, trails and parking lots. Perhaps your group should contact the leaders of these hiking challenges and remind them of your work. Perhaps they would consider including something along the lines of the following on their web site and in their literature: *"This trail and fire tower are maintained by the Friends of Please treat the fire towers and trails well and consider supporting their work by joining, volunteering or making a donation. See the Friends web page or facebook page."*

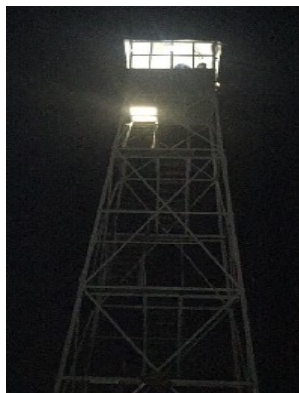
Again, I greatly appreciate all of the comments and hope that contained within them will be some ideas for you to consider and perhaps initiate. If the State Chapter can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to ask.

Calendar

Saturday, January 25, 2020: At Poke O Moonshine there will be Snowshoe Mammal Tracking with Elizabeth Lee. Meet at 9:30 AM at the Observer's trailhead. Be ready for 3-4 hours in the cold, following and identifying mammal tracks in the snow. In cooperation with CATS: <http://champlainareatrails.com>. Sign-up required, minimum of 6 participants.

Saturday, February 8, 2020: Try a Poke O Moonshine Back Country Ski Exploration. Meet at the Observer's trailhead at 9:30 to explore roads west of Poke-O. David will lead this trip for skiers with at least intermediate skills, to manage some steep, narrow terrain. Arduous, 3-4 hours. In cooperation with CATS: <http://champlainareatrails.com>

Lighting Photos: As promised some more photos from our September Lighting. This time we have Snowy from Fred K, Hadley by Brad, and Bald by Joe D. Thank you all!



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