



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
October 2020**



We have a winner! Lori Ann was the October photo contest winner on our Facebook page. This month we narrowed it down to a sunrise and sunset theme for photos. Thanks for submitting this wonderful photo from Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower at sunset, Lori Ann! Next month, we will try for flora and fauna taken from the fire tower or along a fire tower trail.

Another plea for more Forest Rangers: We continue to hear of more and more rescues and searches that our Forest Rangers must respond to. A quick question for you all – when was the last time you ran into a Forest Ranger out on the trail on patrol? Not one at the trailhead register, not one involved in a search and rescue operation, just a Forest Ranger out on patrol? For me, it was about 5 years ago, perhaps 6. I would love to hear your answers and will happily pass them along. [Article here](#)

In addition to search and rescue calls, our Forest Rangers were quite busy in mid September with some wildfires, both here and on the West Coast. Thankfully, we have gotten a bit of rain that has helped a lot. From the NYSDEC Ranger Reports:

Wildfires in NYS – 9-29-2020 State Police responded to a wildfire near Loomis Pond in Hamilton County. [NYS Department of Environmental Conservation](#) Forest Rangers were inserted to fight the fire with the assistance of NYS Police Aviation Unit out of Albany.

9-29-2020 Town of Conesus Livingston County Wildland Fire: On Sept. 21, Livingston County 911 contacted Forest Ranger Dormer about a tree on fire in the Hemlock Lake State Forest. Forest Rangers Dormer, Carpenter, and Cordell, along with Fire Warden Bolonda, used a Ranger boat to transport hose, pump, and hand tools to fell and extinguish the tree in a hard-to-access area along Hemlock Lake. While investigating the fire on Sept. 24, Ranger Dormer observed another fire 200 feet uphill from the Hemlock Lake fire. Ranger Dormer and Fire Wardens Bolonda and Clark conducted fire line construction and mop up of the second fire over the following days.

Town of Dresden, Washington County, Wilderness Rescue: On Sept. 19 at 7:43 p.m., Washington County 911 transferred a call to DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch from a hiker advising she was stuck on the trail on Black Mountain and two of her hiking companions were further up the trail. Washington County 911 provided coordinates that placed several members of the hike group from Mechanicville at the Black Mountain Point on the shore of Lake George. Forest Rangers O'Connor and Donegan responded to Black Mountain Point via a boat from Green Island, while Forest Ranger St. Claire responded to the marina at Hulett's Landing. At 10:04 p.m., Ranger O'Connor advised that the two hikers had made their way back to the main group and that all seven hikers were on the boat and being transported to the marina. Once at the marina, Ranger St. Claire drove members of the hiking party to the trailhead to retrieve their vehicles.

10-2-2020: Governor Cuomo Deploys Third DEC Firefighting Crew to Aid Western States Battling Wildland Fires: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-deploys-third-dec-firefighting-crew-aid-western-states-battling-wildland-fires>

A great video was posted on our Facebook page recently – it is worth watching – thanks for bringing it to our attention Brian: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lt9qYvKFumM>

All 2020 Fire Tower Stewards: With the 2020 fire tower stewarding programs, both volunteer and paid, now wrapped up for the season, I want to take time to thank all of those who participated. While our health care officials and our governor all say to stay clear of mass gatherings and crowds, even in outdoor spaces, the Fire Tower Stewards were right in the middle of huge crowds every day they were out there! Yes, they have been wearing masks and practicing social distancing, but still – they are putting themselves in harm's way with hundreds of visitors in rather small outdoor spaces. Your interactions with visitors, your sharing of fire tower history and restoration information, Leave No Trace, hikeSafe principles, NYS Regulations, and more, was greatly needed, particularly with all the new outdoor recreators we were seeing in 2020. My deepest gratitude to all of you, particularly the volunteers who were out there this year. To those who made the choice to not steward due to Covid, I certainly understand and respect that choice, appreciate you taking the time to consider going out there, and hope you will return next year!



Blue: Unfortunately, we got word that Blue Mountain Lake Fire Tower had been vandalized with graffiti on the tower, in the tower cab, on the cabin foundation, and on the rocks at the summit. We made a trip and up to take care of the issue, doing the best we could with some poor weather.



Rock Rift: At their August Town Board meeting, the Town of Tompkins reported they had been awarded a \$4,000 grant to hire an engineer service to inspect and to see all of what's needed to make the fire tower safe for public use. This is a matching grant and the Town of Tompkins needs to match the grant with \$1,000. A motion was made to provide that \$1000.00 and was unanimously approved. We look forward to seeing this project move forward once this very important first step occurs.

Poke O Moonshine: The Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine Fall work day is on Saturday November 7th, starting at 9:30 at the lower trailhead parking area, a mile south of the campground on Route 9. We follow Covid safety protocols for physical distancing, non-sharing of tools, materials and food, and wear masks when six-foot distancing is not possible. Email the Friend's Trail Coordinator Steven Bailey, at baileysa60@yahoo.com with questions and to sign up. Please bring your own iron and/or grass rake. If you'd like to learn some of the construction techniques, bring a shovel and/or a pick-mattock. Bring work gloves and food and liquid. Join for an hour or for the whole day! Sign-up is required.

Berry Hill: Several things have gotten in the way of the plans for the restoration of this tower, but starting Monday all that will change! Much has been done behind the scenes, but on Monday, the on-site work will begin. It is hoped that the weather will allow for some progress this fall and by summer of 2021, we can once again visit the fire tower and see the view from the cab!

Bald Mountain: While many fire towers around the state participated in our Lighting of the Fire Towers event, Bald Mountain also was busy the following weekend with a special 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb. More details on this event, which may become an annual event, are here: <https://www.adirondackexpress.com/adirondack-express-09-18-2020/>

Speculator: The former Makomis fire tower is expected to be erected in Speculator in 2021. A planning meeting was held this month to discuss some fund raising ideas. Think you can help? Let them know. At that meeting, one of the committee persons discussed the Filson Fire Tower videos. I had not seen these before – check them out: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKf7w0848T8>



Mount Arab Fire Tower: On October 6th the Friends of Mount Arab posted some wonderful news and photos about their new windows! This has been a multi year project, fund raising for the windows, then getting them up the mountain, and finally installing them – a tremendous amount of work. Thank you! Volunteer work on the Mount Arab Fire Tower windows was



done by Dick Bentley, Larry Lee, and Herman Vandenburg. They started in September and finished on 4 October 2020.



Pillsbury: Our wonderful volunteers were busy with fire tower work on Pillsbury this past month. Back in August a work date had to be canceled due to weather. We rescheduled to the first weekend in October and had a great group of volunteers who stepped forward to do the work. Behind the scenes this group worked out lodging, (thank you Ron), fresh baked snacks, (thank you Lori Ann), necessary tools, (Ron, Jeremy, Brandon, John), and more. Our DEC liaison, Nick, worked out informing the DEC information folks the tower would



be closed and they announced it on their weekly bulletin.

But on Saturday morning, three of our volunteers would report to our meeting place feeling ill and unable to work. But nonetheless, they, (Lori Ann, Brandon, and Jeremy) drove all the way to our meeting place to drop off tools, (some provided by Ron who dropped them with Lori Ann). Masks were worn. Jim, Kathy, John, Tom and I hiked in from Sled Harbor with our packs loaded with tools since we were down three volunteers, with an eye to the sky. We got to the summit and got right to work. The sky laughed at us, taunted us with rain, snow, and sleet in between short bursts of sunshine and we managed to get all of the stair treads done.

Pillsbury Cont'd: Sunday we were down to just John, Tom and I, but the weather gods were smiling on us as we returned to the fire tower. We managed to get just one landing done and to fit all the tools in just our three packs for the return trip to the cars. We had well over 30 visitors on Saturday and Sunday, many who were very thankful for our work and one who offered to help us. We had others who were not so kind and were certain that we should stop work and let them on the tower – sorry folks it is not safe to be on the tower with no hard hat and with no steps or landing boards! And btw – you walked past several signs informing you the tower would be closed.



As we left on Sunday, we met Lori Ann who was feeling a bit better and was hiking in to help us carry out tools! Back at Sled Harbor, we had a few refreshments and got a great thank you for our work from one of the visitors – he would later ask what organization we were with and give us a donation! What a success story the weekend was – with so much behind the scenes assistance from volunteers and strangers, the tower is looking pretty good. We have three more landings to go as soon as we can get out there in 2021. After that, the radio folks will come in and get the new repeater system in place and we can open up the cab to the public! Thanks to so many who made this work happen!

Communication – As we noted in our June and July newsletters, the possible reopening of the Cathead fire tower is centered around making local communications available in the community (see our web page <http://www.nysffla.org> and write a letter). Additionally, as we were working at Pillsbury fire tower, we were chatting with one of the local highway workers who let us know that their radios work off the tower's repeater. Communication has always been key to making the fire tower system work, and it remains just as important today as it was in the early 1900's. Our communication systems then were not as advanced as they are today. An excerpt from a NYSDEC document on Fire Observation Stations dated August 1965 requires the following of a Fire Tower Observer:

“Telephones: Each fire tower in N.Y.S. Forest Fire Control system is provided with a telephone that is tied into a commercial net. These telephones are built to high standards which allow the Observer to get in touch with the ranger force or fire warden with the least amount of delay in reporting forest fires. Oftentimes observers act as dispatchers and require this kind of communication between their towers and sources of help.

In order to secure the maximum efficiency in the operation of a telephone system, the standards of construction must be maintained at all times. The lines should be gone over thoroughly each year in the spring, bad connections cut out and new ties, wires or insulators put in where necessary Care should be taken to see that the line wire does not rub against a tree and that work of removing brush, limbs, etc is thoroughly done. It is just as important to see that insulated wire is kept free from contact with brush or trees as it is open wire, because one never knows where the insulation will wear off and thus cause trouble which is usually difficult to locate.

District rangers, rangers, and observers whenever traveling along the State telephone lines should make it a point to look over the line carefully to detect any trouble and make the necessary repairs.

Telephone Troubles – Any telephone trouble of a serious nature should be reported to the District Ranger for definite instructions.

To help correct the most common troubles it is recommended that reference to the Western Fire Fighter's Manual be made as often as is needed.

The telephone is in the room at the top of the tower This instrument should be protected from the weather and the Observer should not tamper with the wiring or any other mechanism inside the telephone instrument unless specifically ordered to do so by his District Ranger.

Telephone Test – The Observer should test his telephone by calling central, or his Ranger, the first thing each morning in times of dry weather at least two or three times during the day, in order to determine whether the line is in working order If the line is found to be out of order, the Observer should immediately go down over the line and endeavor to locate the trouble. Location of trouble in the telephone line of the first importance because the observation station is of little or no use, unless it has telephone service.

Reporting Fires – When the Observer has satisfied himself as to the location of the fire, he should call up the District Ranger, Ranger or Fire Warden, and get the call through to him just as promptly as possible. Toll calls to District Rangers and Rangers may be made with charges collect, if this practice has been approved by the District Ranger. However, calls to fire wardens or others should be prepaid calls charged to the observation station, the bill for which is paid by the Conservation Department. Moreover, calls from fire wardens or others which may be put in to the Observer to inform him as to the issuing of fire permits or to give accurate information as to forest fires, should be accepted by the Observer to be charged to the Department.

If it is a toll call, the Observer should inform the operator that he wants to report a fire and ask her in a courteous manner to rush the call. If the observation station is on a party line and the Observer finds the line in use, he should, in a courteous manner, interrupt the people talking to tell them that he has to report a fire and ask them if they will yield the use of the line to him while he makes his report. The exercise of courtesy on the part of the Observer in using the telephone line will do much to speed up the service and maintain good will.



Report of telephone calls – The Observer is required to keep a record of all telephone calls put out from his station for which a toll charge will be made against the station. He should list each call under the proper date, giving place called, and whether it was person to person, or station call. At the end of each month, he should transmit this report to his District Ranger. The purpose of his report is to provide the District office with a check against any errors which might occur in the telephone company bill received by the District Office.”

Follow up from Lighting Event: Our friends in New Jersey joined us this year for our annual Lighting Event. The Green Pond Mountain Lookout Tower was lit up for the first time in 30 years! Here is a great story about what they did: <https://www.army.mil/article/239477>

Cathedral Rock Fire Tower: continues to be closed to the public.

Stillwater Fire Tower: Closed October 13th through December 20th for hunting season.

Spruce Fire Tower: Closes Oct 24th for big game hunting season, northern zone.

Berry Hill: Closed to the public during restoration work from October 19th until further notice.

Goodnow Fire Tower: The fire tower cab is closed to the public at this time.

Holiday Shopping: As we near holiday shopping season, I would suggest that you consider a donation to your favorite fire tower group or make a purchase from them. Don't have a favorite group? Perhaps the FFLA would be a great place to send your donation, give the gift of membership or make a purchase. Gifts of fire tower patches, hats, shirts, and books are wonderful and greatly appreciated among fire tower friends. <http://ffla.org/lookout-store.html>

Our NYS Chapter continues to grow. We are very thankful for those of you who have renewed your membership in 2020 or those of you who have become new members. Our Facebook page now has over 700 followers. We greatly appreciate all of your support and contributions. Thanks to that wonderful support, we have been able to care for several of our historic fire towers even during the Covid 19 pandemic. Some people wonder what they can do to help. The smallest thing is greatly appreciated, a story to share here or on our Facebook page, an assist with a project, fresh baked goods for that project, a monetary donation, housing for a work crew, a safety item donation, information about a need at a tower. We appreciate it all and it all matters! Thank you!

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter FFLA
<http://www.nysffla.org>