



## Forest Fire Lookout Association New York State Chapter September 2021



WOW what an exciting month for fire towers in New York State! We have had several wonderful things happen to fire towers and Observer's cabins this month and we had an extremely successful Lighting of the Fire Tower event! We have all of our usual things going on too, starting with the Monthly photo contest. It seems only fitting that the winner of the photo contest was Doug Randall who posted the photo in the upper right corner from a previous years lighting. Not only does Doug have the distinction of having the tallest tower in the state (the former Swancott Hill Fire Tower) at 99 feet 9 inches tall, but he also has the most colored lights of any tower! The winning photo will be our Facebook page cover photo for the next month. Congratulations to Doug! And thanks to everyone for playing along.

Kane Mountain Fire Tower Observer's cabin: The NYSDEC was able to secure materials for a new roof, repairs to the porch, and to secure the building. The FFLA awarded a grant to the local chapter to provide the stain needed for the exterior of the cabin. The DEC flew the materials in to the site with the assistance of the NYSP flight crew. They surprised some visitors in the Kane Mt. Fire Tower cab when the 4 packages got dropped in! Forest Ranger Dave Nally and our DEC liaison Jon DeSantis were on the ground to accept the materials. Jon, his intern and one operation worker got right to the work. That included some really wet days involving a hurricane, but they got the job done in short order. Then FFLA volunteers Tom, Debi, and Pat, joined Jon and myself and we got the stain on just before the next hurricane came in! Many thanks to everyone! Check out these before and after photos! What a difference!





**We have our first FFLA Affiliate Member** – The Friends of St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower! We hope this special membership will provide them with much greater visibility. Check out all that they have been up to as reported by member Doug Fitzgerald:

**Painting:** Rich has taken on the painting project with gusto. He has hiked up the mountain on an almost weekly basis; he both paints and plays the role of summit steward while he is there. Bob has also been there helping when he can and I even got into the act on Monday. Tom Hirshblond has been helping a couple of days also.

**Fencing:** Minor repairs have been made. Much of the fencing has to be temporarily removed for painting; when it is put back in place additional repairs are made. Total replacement using improved materials and techniques still remains a priority.

**Summit Steward:** Ethan Johnson from AWI has been on the mountain every Friday, Saturday and Sunday this summer. He is doing an excellent job interacting with visitors and posts weekly updates and trail reports on our Facebook page.

**Interpretive Panels:** On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, Doug, Jack and Rich, and volunteer/craftsman Jay packed the panels to the tower - each taking their turn. Here are several pictures of the process to install them. The final product is wonderful!

**VIC:** Our collaborative efforts and partnership with the VIC are on track. The new director Scott van Lear is excited to be working with us. The original crank phone from the tower is on display in the main room where you can see it while looking at the mountain. It is in beautiful condition and is worth seeing. Historic materials long preserved by Rob Marrone have been transferred to the VIC for preservation and future display. Hats, patches and stickers are available in the VIC store.



**Website and Social Media:** These two areas are kept active and busy with the assistance of Ethan and Rich.

**Lighting Connections:** Lake Clear Lodge is planning a dinner event during the lighting and hope to be able to donate some of the proceeds to our group. With the VIC an interpretive hike to the summit led by The Friends on Saturday and a viewing opportunity from their deck.



## Lighting of the Fire Towers

Our 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Lighting of the Fire Tower was a wonderfully successful event! My sincere thanks to each and every Illuminator out there who lit 24 fire towers state wide. We had beautiful clear, starry skies and it was a bit chilly, but nothing the Illuminators and their teams could not manage. As the event grows, we make every attempt to get more and more information out in advance of the event, which gets more people interested. We try to stress that this event is a community connection to remember all of the men and women who looked over the local communities, their homes, their businesses and their forests. I think that message was well received in 2021.

Our friends to the south joined us too! - NJ FFLA State Director Bob Wolff said they joined us in lighting at least 3 of their towers! Saturday evening you could see Catfish, Culvers and Picatinny Arsenal Tower lit! Thanks for joining in the fun! Bob also tells me this will be the kick off to their 100th Anniversary of Catfish fire tower in 2022.

We had several great articles in local media including

<https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2021/08/annual-fire-tower-lighting-happening-sept-4.html>

Even better were the comments from Louis Curth, NYSDEC Forest Ranger, Retired and author of *The Forest Rangers A History of the New York State Forest Ranger Force*. Lou wrote:

*“I join Peter Slocum in a remembrance of our fire towers and also the fire tower observers, whose loyal service was the backbone of the forest ranger force, until the latter half of the 20th century when the DEC began to replace them with scheduled aerial detection flights.*

*The lasting popularity of our fire towers has deep roots. For forest rangers like me, who came on during the extremely dry 1960s, we relied on our observers for spotting fires, but also for communications. Back then we relied almost entirely on telephone land lines which required frequent repair and maintenance by the rangers and observers all during fire season. We also had a few limited range WWII surplus radios which were replaced later in the 1960s by a more reliable radio system including new tower radios for the observers and new “lunch box portable radios” for every ranger – reliable radios at last!*

*Times were changing for the rangers and the observers. Meanwhile, the popularity of fire towers as a destination for hikers just continued to grow and grow year after year. Fire tower observers became DEC’s mountain top ambassadors, welcoming visitors, answering their questions and even presenting them with a memento – a signed card attesting to their visit. Even today, many people still have these cards among family keepsakes.*

*With this bygone era in mind, take a moment on Sept. 4th, at 9 PM, and salute our fire towers and the distinguished men and women who served as our forest fire observers and so much more.”*

*“Laurie Rankin and the Forest Fire Lookout Assoc., Peter Slocum, via the Essex County Historical Association, and many other dedicated volunteers have succeeded in turning our remaining fire towers into living tributes to a pioneer forest fire detection system and the people whose made it succeed.*

*To accomplish this feat, much hands-on, hard work is done annually. They maintain our remaining fire towers and keep them safe and open to the public. They also volunteer their time to greet hikers and visitors to the towers in the finest tradition of the original forest fire observers. Without their efforts, this colorful part of our state’s history would be lost forever. It is a job well done.”*

Thank you so much for your history and your kind words Lou.

We also had a spot on North Country Public Radio:

<https://www.northcountrypublicradio.org/news/story/44400/20210902/fire-tower-lighting-on-saturday-pays-homage-to-fire-observers>

And the Malone Telegram: [https://www.mymalonetelegram.com/top\\_stories/azure-mountain-fire-tower-to-take-part-in-statewide-lighting-event/article\\_9e2ddbf7-b354-51fa-bf06-0e725ae9982f.html](https://www.mymalonetelegram.com/top_stories/azure-mountain-fire-tower-to-take-part-in-statewide-lighting-event/article_9e2ddbf7-b354-51fa-bf06-0e725ae9982f.html)

Another article: <https://www.adirondackalmanack.com/2021/08/a-view-of-st-regis-mountain-fire-tower.html>

Social Media loves the photos of the fire towers lit up (as do we) and we seemed to connect with past Observers and Rangers and their family members better this year. We got some great feedback and we got some suggestions for the future and we tried to put it all together in photos on our web page. Please check out this link: <http://nysffla.org/light2021.html> Enjoy the spirit of this event here and please take time to remember those who served in these historical fire towers!

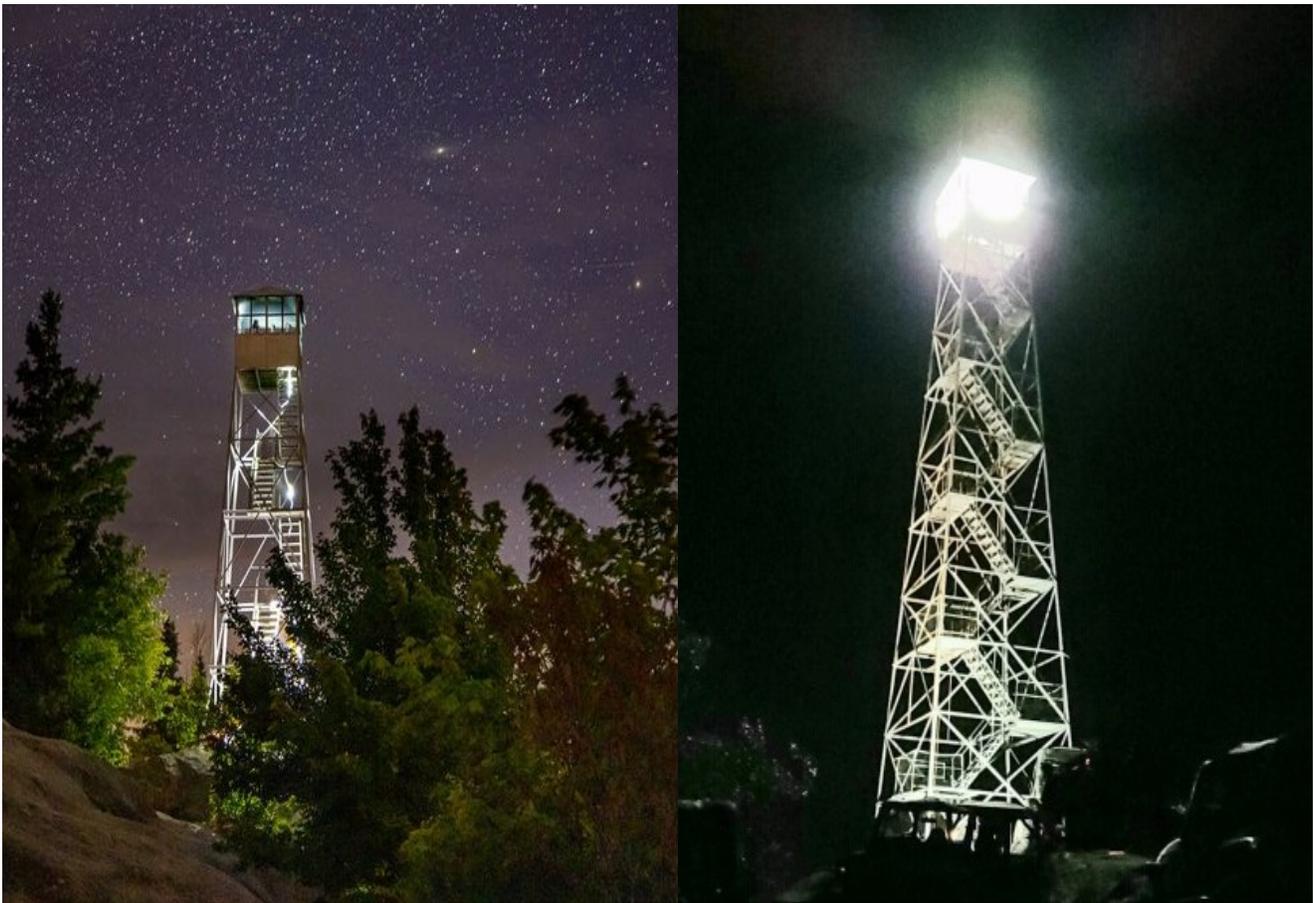
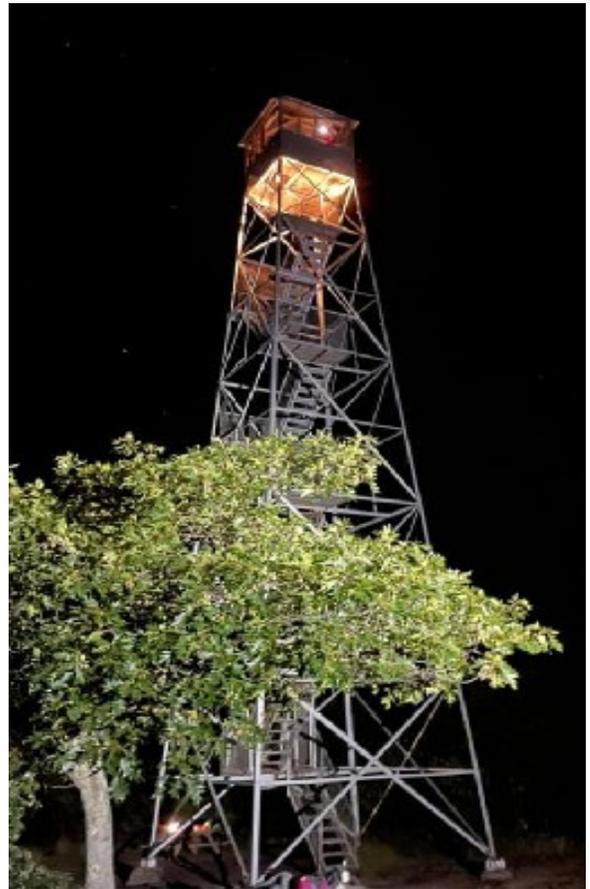


Photo credit (L) Bald by Steff Obkerchnerg, (R) by Kevin Gennodie of Beacon

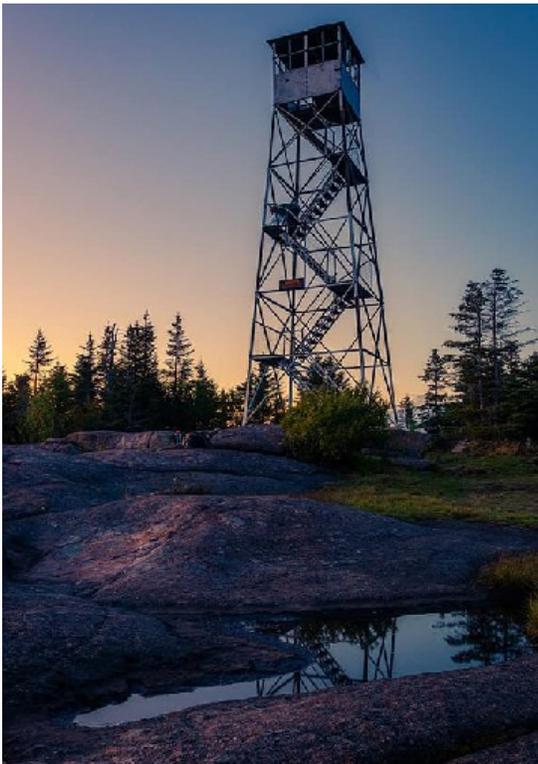
From Mitch Davis at Swede where Forest Ranger Chuck Kabrehl did the lighting - "I think this is a really cool annual event as my great uncle Fred Rice was the observer on Pharaoh Mountain for a season. I told him we were going and about this event and he thought it was really cool!"



Cornell Hill by Jim McKnight



Overlook by Lourdes Senora



St. Regis by Mark Boyce



Sterling Forest by Susan Serico

From Doug Hamilton at Red Hill: My wife Jona and I went up to Red Hill last night and lit up Red Hill with a couple of spotlights, 3 - 600 watt work lights and a Coleman lantern. People on the ground told us it looked like the Star of Bethlehem on Red Hill.

From Maria Erdo at Owls Head: We were able to string a rope across the center to hang two LED lanterns that Maria purchased on Amazon.

Comments from retired Forest Ranger Gary Lee: “The fire tower lighting went on Saturday night in a clear sky with just a few clouds to the west of us. I was up on the top landing of the Woodhull Firer Tower, but I didn’t get up there in time for sunset. I saw their [Rondaxe] light first come on just before nine and then I saw Jim Fox turn on the Stillwater Tower. I wasn’t sure of Blue because I hadn’t seen that before, but I saw green strobe lights and Forest Ranger Jason Scott said he had strobe light going so I knew it was Blue.”



Stillwater by Harry Peck



Berry Hill by Bill Ackroyd

**More in our October newsletter!**

**PLEASE NOTE: Swede Mountain Fire Tower is now closed until December 16<sup>th</sup> Please respect this hunting season closure and look forward to the reopening in December.**

Laurie