



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
March 2023**

March can be such a fickle month; spring one day, winter the next, and sometimes summer too! Wednesday the 21st is the first official day of Spring. March snows are falling as I type this and wetting down what has been some rather dry conditions since last month's newsletter. There were numerous wildfires springing up. The Ranger Reports of the last month reflect this and can be found later in this newsletter.

When Mike Cady took the winning photo for this month's Facebook contest in March of 2022, there was plenty of snow at the Cathedral Rock Fire Tower in Wanakena. Congratulations to Mike on being the winner of the contest, receiving the most votes from the members on the page, and now gracing the cover of that page for the next month. Photo below, right.

Historically, many Observers would climb to their towers in the spring via snowshoes over a deep snow pack. The valleys might have bare ground and be experiencing high fire danger or they may still be snow covered. Conditions did affect the start date of the season for the Observer.

From the Podskoch collection, we find a mention of spring in a Walton Reporter Column from 1968 entitled, THE HORN, by Rube Rustic. In that column, Rustic says that in “the year 1956, the fire tower man on Balsam Round-top (now known as Balsam Lake) didn't open the fire tower to the public until May 3rd, a month late! The snow was six feet in the woods and he had to use snowshoes. When Gus came back down off the mountain for supplies, he said, “I saw one place where I snowshoed over the top of a 55 gallon oil drum on the way down and didn't even know it.” Finding the phone line to the tower could also be a challenge in the early spring. Parts of it might still be under the snow.

I invite you to another welcoming of spring from Norm Van Valkenburgh, found in his book, 'Old Stone Walls Catskill Land and Lore', as he returns from an early spring visit to Hunter Mt. Fire Tower, “In years to come, my recollection of this day would be pleasant. I was tired and my muscles ached, but both feelings were overcome by the experiences my senses enjoyed. I had heard and talked to the dwellers of the forest; I had smelled the pure smells of the woods awakening from a frosty night; I had seen the mountains as they once were and viewed the magnificent distance of the Catskills from one of their highest peaks; I had felt the warm sun and the sensation of freedom of the hills; I had savored the taste of a squashed cheese sandwich flavored with the scent of balsam and had drunk from the coolness of a mountain spring. Perhaps most important, I had been witness, on this spring day, to the birth of a season.” Thank you Norm!



From the 2-22-23 Ranger report:

Statewide Fire Danger information: DEC is urging New Yorkers to take extra caution due to this year's warm and dry winter season. While the [statewide burn ban doesn't take effect until March 16](#), the majority of the State's land is dry and brown.

Hamlet of Garrison/Putnam County

Debris Fire and Rescue: On Feb 13 at 3:45 p.m., Forest Rangers Cowart and Russo responded to a leaf litter fire off of Schuyler Road. The 79-year-old homeowner was burning leaf litter and an ember blew to a nearby property, burning a gazebo. While looking at his damaged gazebo, the 82-year-old property owner had a seizure. Rangers provided medical care until an ambulance arrived. The homeowner who started the fire was issued two violations for setting a fire which endangered the property of another.

Hamlet of Callicoon Center/Sullivan County

Wildland Fire: On Feb. 13 at 4 p.m., Callicoon Fire requested Forest Ranger assistance with a wildland fire. Rangers Franke, Quinones, Schweider, and Stratton responded. A homeowner was burning treated wood when the fire escaped and spread into the woods. The fire department completed a fire line around the perimeter. Rangers measured the fire at approximately 2.5 acres. Rangers put out hot spots and issued a ticket to the homeowner for not clearing three feet around the fire. On Feb. 14 at 1:10 p.m., Rangers declared the fire out.

Hamlet of Mahopac/Putnam County

Wildland Fire: On Feb. 15 at 4:50 p.m., Forest Ranger Lieutenant Ashida and Ranger Cowart responded to a wildland fire behind a residence in Mahopac. Carmel, Croton Falls, Mahopac, and Somers fire departments contained the fire to three acres. Rangers continued putting out hot spots to prevent the fire from spreading to nearby homes. On Feb. 16 at 1:30 p.m., Rangers declared the fire out.

Town of Angelica/Allegany County

Wildland Fire: On Feb. 15 at 5:20 p.m., Forest Rangers Richer and Thaine responded to a wildland fire on Old State Road in Angelica. Angelica, Belfast, Belmont, Friendship, and Short Tract fire departments got the fire under control before Rangers arrived. Rangers helped put out hot spots and measured the fire at 7.5 acres. The fire was caused by smoldering debris from brush burning. At 6:20 p.m., Rangers declared the fire out. Allegany County Fire District, Allegany County Medical Transport Service, and Angelica Ambulance also responded.

And from this week:

Town of Southeast/Putnam County

Wildland Fire: On March 7 at 3:18 p.m., Putnam County requested Forest Ranger assistance with a brushfire that started with leaf burning and spread in the town of Southeast. Rangers Pries and Russo responded, ensured the two-acre fire was out, and issued tickets to the property owner for failure to remove flammable material within three feet of a fire and leaving a fire unattended.

Burn Ban: Please note the state wide burn ban goes into effect this week on March 16th and continues through May 14th.

Around the Country

Retired Forest Ranger Gary Lee sent me an article from Missouri recently and that caused me to do some online searching. I found this article particularly informative as it tells of the history of fire towers there, and that they are still utilized at times for fire spotting. When high fire danger exists, the state of Missouri still mans these historic structures. New York is not immune to fire danger as you can see from the Ranger Reports. Perhaps some day NYS will again use our towers for fire spotting. <https://www.news-leader.com/story/news/local/ozarks/2020/09/30/missouri-department-conservation-fire-towers-forest-service-mdc/5872292002/>

Here is something new that was posted on our Facebook page – fire protection with goats and sheep, a new concept or a historical one? <https://conversationalist.org/2022/08/31/fighting-fire-with-flerd-cole-bush-goats/>

March is Women's History Month – this heart warming story comes to us from our friends in Oregon and features the Cloud Girls:

<https://traveloregon.com/things-to-do/destinations/parks-forests-wildlife-areas/the-cloud-girls/>

What can you do to help?

As you have read, Spring is a time of renewal, the world around us is awakening from a long winter slumber. It stretches and yawns and leaps forward to a new season. Here at the NYS Chapter of the FFLA, we are looking forward as well. But to see the way forward, we need your help. We are seeking volunteer help with a number of things. In our calendar section, you will see numerous opportunities to assist us in our work. We do not require a commitment of several days, if you can spare one day to assist us, it is greatly appreciated. Opportunities include:

Stewarding: Do you like talking to other people about your love of fire towers? We have several opportunities for you to be a steward at a fire tower. We provide an orientation session, uniform, handbook, all of the supplies for your work, and you get to meet and greet visitors at a fire tower, all while enjoying the view.

Trailwork: Do you prefer to work on trails? We would like to help the Town of Long Lake complete their work on the trail to Buck Mt. so that tower can once again be open to the public. Or perhaps you would like to help the folks at Stissing work on their new trail, more on that later in this newsletter? We hope to make some improvements at the Pillsbury fire tower trail this year.

Tower Work: Do you prefer doing tower repairs? We have some work to do at Snowy this summer.

Painting: Are you a painter? We always seem to need to paint over graffiti on fire towers. It is an important way to care for these historical structures and keep vandals at bay while you enjoy the views.

What's in it for you? Our work depends on the generosity of our volunteers. We always try to reward that work with not only our thanks but with some other items such as refreshments, stickers, patches, or beverage holders, mentions here and on facebook. But is that enough? At our Executive Committee meeting earlier this month we discussed ways we can support our volunteers. Stay tuned as the ideas fall into place in the coming months. And THANK YOU for considering.

Around the State

Survey: Please remember the NYS DEC Kiosk Survey – many of our fire tower trailhead kiosks are in need of some help. By completing this survey, it is hoped that some improvements will be made in the future. Thanks for helping out. <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/124251.html>

Bramley: It was very disappointing for the Friends of Bramley Mt. Fire Tower and for us here at the FFLA, when the Delhi Town Council voted against signing a required agreement with the NYC DEP, who now owns the summit of Bramley Mt. This February 13th decision garnered responses from the Clark Family, who took down the tower and have cared for it for years, the Friends group, and the local community.

According to Ann Roberti, President of the Friends Group, the local Town Council did not notify the group of their decision, rather “the only explanation we have received for this vote against the tower is this short quote about the DEP agreement from Supervisor Tuthill which appeared in *The Mountain Eagle* article about the council's decision: "There were so many unknowns about cost, control, and what the town would be responsible for."

What the Supervisor is saying about the costs is completely unfounded, since the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower are covering 100% of the costs of the tower's restoration, construction, ongoing maintenance and the expense of taking the tower down in the unlikely event that it should ever need to be removed. A Memorandum of Agreement between the Friends and the Town would have spelled out all of the conditions and responsibilities of the Friends and cleared up any potential "unknowns." The Town Supervisor had received the offer letter from the DEP back in August 2022, and, in all of that time, no effort was made to discuss any concerns with either the DEP or the Friends of the Fire Tower.

Ann goes on to tell us, “ Supervisor Tuthill stated that the town would support putting the tower somewhere else in town, not on city owned property, but that option is not acceptable to the Friends or to the tower owners, the Clark Family. **The Bramley Mountain Fire Tower belongs on Bramley Mountain. We remain fully committed to this project, and we will explore every avenue for restoring the tower to its rightful home.**”

If you are as upset about this decision as we are, please, let Town Supervisor Mark Tuthill and Council Members Peg Baldwin and Bill Cairns know how you feel. And, don't forget to thank Council Members Matt Kzryston and Christina Viafore for their ongoing support of the fire tower. E-mail addresses for Council Members can be found on the Delhi Town website.

While the Town Council's decision is unfortunate, they are hearing from their constituents that support the Fire Tower project. In this news article you can see that a petition was signed by many local residents requesting a return of the tower to the summit. Perhaps the Town Council will see the tower for the gift that it is and reconsider their decision in the near future.

https://www.thedailystar.com/news/fire-tower-supporters-petition-delhi-board/article_9ed06f58-c271-11ed-9406-c77941e853e3.html

Mt. Adams: Mt. Adams is seeking trail and tower crews for 2023. For more information and to sign up visit - <https://adkhigheaksfoundation.org/mt-adams/>

Visits done in the last month: Stissing and Ferneliff

Leonard Hill: We continue to await the results of a request for an engineering evaluation from September of 2018, but have been told the engineer is actively working on it. Funding for restoration work at the fire tower is approved and NYS DEC will be developing a work plan when the engineers report is completed. They have already made some significant improvements in the area. We are looking forward to the opportunity to work on this project. Meanwhile, Leonard Hill is getting some local interest together with the Scary-19 hiking challenge. <https://visitschohariecounty.com/blog/scary-19-hiking-challenge>

St. Regis: Sad news from our Friends of St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower, an affiliate of the FFLA. “It is with sadness that we inform you of the passing of FOSRMFT Board Member, Ed Hixson. Ed was a great advocate for the preservation and restoration of the St. Regis Mountain fire tower. Over twenty years ago, he was there at the very beginning of the battle to preserve our tower. In 2015 on the first day of restoration work Ed was already on the summit when the rest of us arrived. In more recent years, Ed would meet work crews at St. Regis Landing and ferry us by boat to the Lake Trail, which was an easier route to travel with tools and supplies. One of those rides was in a late October blowing snowstorm before sunrise. That was some ride!

We referred to Ed as the “Ambassador” for the tower. He wore a Friends hat everywhere he went. A couple years ago we gave him a new hat as his original was looking pretty rough. In the hallway at his house both hats are still hanging. One was his everyday work hat and the other was for more formal occasions, like going to the Shamrock for dinner. Ed will be missed.”

<https://fortunekeoughfuneralhome.com/book-of-memories/5144353/Hixson-Jr-MD-Dr-Edward/index.php>

Our condolences to Ed's family and all of his St. Regis family as well.

Poke O Moonshine: The Friends of Poke O Moonshine are seeking a Summit Steward for 2023. The work week is 40 hours, Thursday–Monday, mid-May – late August or through Labor Day if possible; the duration of employment will be 10-15 weeks . Pay for 2023 is \$20/hour. The application contact is the Friends’ Coordinator, David Thomas-Train and the application deadline is April 1, 2023. The Friends website, www.pokeomoonshine.org provides additional information. Please include cover letter, resume, and at least two references. The successful candidate will be hired by May 1st.

Ferncliff: It is always a pleasure to visit Ferncliff Forest. There are always improvements being done at the Forest. This time we found an expanded parking lot, more picnic tables, a new tent platform and some work done by beavers too. Unfortunately, we also saw some significant graffiti once again. We are working with the Forest to try to get this taken care of as soon as the weather allows. Such awesome views from this wonderful fire tower!

Hurricane: Love fire towers? Love the Adirondacks? Come to Hurricane Mountain and enjoy the best views, a fire tower and so much more. The Friends of Hurricane are looking for volunteers for our summit steward program. As a volunteer, you get to share your passion for the outdoors with other hikers. You help educate them on how they can preserve the forest and provide them with guidance to keep them safe on the trails. Training is done in coordination with the Adirondack Mountain Club. If interested, contact Mary Jean Bland at mjbland@aol.com

Stissing: We were very pleased to obtain a sneak peak at the wonderful work being done at Stissing Mt. Fire Tower this month. Brian, Chair of the Friends of Stissing Landmarks (FOSL) Trails Committee, (<https://stissingfiretower.org/>) is making significant improvements that include the development of a new trail to the Stissing Fire Tower. This trail will provide visitors with a unique hike as they wind up stone stairs, pass through ledge rocks, and enjoy views of the Taconic Range and Thompson Pond on their way to the historic fire tower. After enjoying the views from the fire tower, visitors will have the option of making it a loop hike and returning along the historic Observer's road or taking the steeper route past the Observer's cabin site to return to their vehicles. Or you can return the way you came and add in a walk around Thompson Pond! FOSL hopes to have work completed by the fall and will hold a Grand Opening celebration then. To help with the new trail, you can visit the FOSL website, sign up for their newsletter, and see what work dates are available and may fit in your schedule. On their website you can see some photos and captions of the work that is underway - *“Thank you to our volunteers who showed up on a beautiful Wednesday to set rocks on the new loop tower trail. We look forward to our work day with DLC and Nature Conservancy in April. If you would like to volunteer, sign up at our website for our newsletter. We will have a link and spring events calendar to share shortly.”* Thank you FOSL for your continued care and improvements at Stissing!



Tower Closings/Seasonal Road Closures/Trail Closures

Sterling Forest and Jackie Jones - Towers are closed pending inspections.

Beebe Hill - Tower is closed pending repairs.

Tower Closings/Seasonal Road Closures/Trail Closures, continued

Goodnow: The Goodnow Mountain Trailhead, Trail and Firetower are CLOSED until further notice to accommodate an active timber harvest.

Moose River Plains Recreation Area is closed: This affects the trailhead to Wakely Fire Tower.

Sundown Wild Forest - The section of Dinch Road that leads to the Red Hill Fire Tower Trailhead in the Sundown Wild Forest is seasonally maintained and not plowed throughout the winter. Visitors should note that the Dinch Road Trailhead location is generally inaccessible throughout the winter. Visitors who wish to visit the Red Hill Firetower should consider using the trail and parking area on Denning Road.

Balsam Lake Mountain Wild Forest - The eastern 2-miles of Beaverkill Road / Turnwood Road that leads to the Balsam Lake Mountain Trailhead is only seasonally maintained and not plowed throughout the winter. Visitors should note that this trailhead location is generally inaccessible throughout the winter.

Calendar for 2023

4-29-23: Orientation for Berry Hill stewarding

May 2023: Buck Fire Tower and Trail dates to be determined as weather allows

5-6-23: Orientation for Kane stewarding

5-13-23: Orientation for Dickinson Hill stewarding

5-20-23: Mt Adams trail work – see bottom of page 4

6-3-23: Orientation for Stillwater stewarding and Spring Trail Work National Trails Day Event

6-10 & 11: Lyon Mt Trail Work – best weather day

7-7 – 9: The 2023 FFLA Western Conference will be held in St. Regis, Montana

7-29 and 30: Snowy work project to repair fencing and railing, maybe paint?

8-5, 6, 19, 20, 26, 27: Pillsbury work project to finish the cab if radio equip is moved, clean summit, repurpose lumber for board walk

8-12 and 13: The 2023 FFLA Eastern Summer Regional Conference will be held in Andover, N.J.

9-2-23: Lighting Event

9-3-23: Lighting Event Rain Date

To sign up simply drop me a line at our webpage: Click Contact - <http://nysffla.org/>

Happy Spring! Laurie

Laurie Rankin, Director NYS Chapter FFLA/www.nysffla.org