



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

I try to use this newsletter to share news and to provide appropriate information related to fire towers nationwide as well as in New York State. Fire towers are unique. Many do stand throughout our country and state. It is always good to find out we are not alone in our work of saving these historical structures and their history. I hope this newsletter lets you know there are others who face the same successes and challenges that you do. One challenge that I find of concern is that for the last several years the increase in popularity of hiking to our towers is occurring. I know, it sounds like a good problem to have. But an increase in visitor numbers does not always mean success. In the past we have seen hiking challenges encourage the public to visit to earn a patch; The Adirondack Mountain Club Fire Tower Challenge, the Tupper Lake Triad, the Saranac Six, the Moriah Challenge, the Indian Lake Challenge, and others seem to pop up all the time. This year NYS joined the 'fun' with the Catskill 5 Challenge. This challenge offered not a patch that you could buy, but a number of prizes and pins you could obtain.

To the best of my knowledge, none of these hiking challenges offer any funds back to the fire towers to help maintain the trails and protect the natural resources that surround the towers. Nor do these challenges give back to the maintenance of the physical structures such as the historic fire towers, Observer's cabins or privies. Nor do these challenges give the Friends of Groups or others who maintain and staff these fire towers any funds.

Again, it may sound like a good problem to have; to have more visitors, but is it? For the first time, I have some hard numbers to include in this discussion. At Balsam Lake Fire Tower in 2018 between July 11th (what would become the beginning date of the Catskill 5 Challenge) and the Monday of Columbus Day the volunteers saw 854 visitors on weekends and holidays from 10-4. In 2019 between those same dates, the volunteers saw 1804 visitors! I know there may be some variables in there such as rainy days versus sunny days and such, but essentially we saw double the number of visitors in a single year since this new Catskill 5 Challenge began.

What is the cost to our fire towers, our trails, the natural resource, the neighbors, parking lots, privies, and our stewards with this increase? On the surface it may seem that more people knowing about fire towers is a good thing, but with twice as many feet on the trail, twice as many visitors to speak with in the same period of time, twice as many cars using the parking lot, twice as many people using the privy (if there is one), I would suggest that the fire towers may be losing in this equation. Unless the people and entities who develop these challenges encourage visitors to give something back, I fear we are going to see some real damage occur. The repairs to that damage will fall on the backs of those who have volunteered thousands of hours, left behind family and friends to do so and continue to greet the record number of visitors with a smile. Or will some towers have to close due to deterioration?

Perhaps you have a different opinion of these challenges. I would love to hear other opinions and would be happy to print them as space allows in the next months newsletters. In the meantime, I am planning how best to advocate for more resources to meet this demand before damage is done that cannot be undone.

## News From Around the State

**Pillsbury:** The third weekend in September saw the Pillsbury Fire Tower getting some much needed love. The logistics of the work weekend had been planned for a number of weeks with Nick, our DEC liaison. As part of the VSA that the FFLA signed with the DEC, a plan was made. Nick had already had materials flown into the site to replace all of the wood on the fire tower with a long term goal of upgrading the repeater equipment on the tower that will allow the cab to be reopened to the public. The tower has some interesting logistics in that the road to the trailhead is often closed late into the spring or even into the summer due to mud season and then the black fly season comes on strong! With vacations included in there, September was our goal for work. We had excellent support from FFLA member Ron who generously offered us the use of his cabin which is not far away. Then we had a really nice number of people who came forward to assist us on Saturday including John and Jack K, Jeremy and Brandon P, Lori Ann, Jim H, John S, Tom R, and Adam N. We even got Jeff to tag along unexpectedly. On Sunday many of the day one crew returned including John and Jack, Jeremy and Brandon, Lori Ann, Tom, and Adam. Sam and Allison joined us and we found Jeff at the top in the morning ready to help another day too! We were able to take advantage of the nice weather and get a number of steps replaced, two landings and we got the majority of the fire tower painted. Sounds easy doesn't it? Well let us not forget all of the tools that were necessary for this job and all had to be carried to the top and back! A huge shout out of thanks to all of these great volunteers! Also to Ron for the nearby lodging which was great to have and to Nick for getting so many of the tools together for us to use and carrying many of the supplies up the week before too! We will be back next year to finish this project!



**St. Regis:** The crew at St. Regis has continued to be very busy with routine maintenance and repairs at the fire tower despite the late calendar date. The crew has been painting, making certain there is a protective layer between the steel and the pressure treated lumber and also cleaning out the leg brackets. Cooler weather does not stand in the way of this ambitious group of volunteers! Thanks for all of your work!

**Balsam Lake Fire Tower:** Sometimes we set aside all of the work for a bit of fun. Contacted earlier this summer by a gentleman who wanted to propose marriage in the cab of the fire tower, the volunteer crew at BLM stepped up to the plate and offered to open the tower on a recent Friday. The weather could not have been better and the bride to be was very surprised and said yes! Many thanks to all the volunteers who stepped forward to do this and Bill S who actually opened the tower cab for the occasion.

**Rescues:** Once again, rescues from fire tower trails are in the weekly Ranger Reports. From the 10-09 Ranger Report – On Oct 1 DEC Dispatch received a call requesting assistance from a 59 year old woman from Oneida who became stranded during heavy rains on the cliff ledges on Bald Mountain. Forest Rangers Matthew Savarie, Gary Miller, and Luke Evens responded and brought gear to execute a high-angle rope rescue. At 8:45 pm Forest Rangers located the woman and were assisted by Old Forge and Eagle Bay Fire Departments getting the woman and her dog the few hundred feet back up to the trail, where they were escorted back to the trailhead.

On Oct 5 Ray Brook Dispatch was advised a 73 year old man from Central Square had an unstable knee injury on the Bald Mt Trail. Lt Scott Murphy arrived on scene along with Old Forge and Eagle Bay fire departments and headed up the trail, locating him at 2:12 pm, a quarter of the way up. The man was placed in a rescue litter and rope rescue gear was used to lower him down 100 feet of rock face. At the trailhead, the injured man was evaluated by Old Forge Ambulance and he refused further care.

Are we seeing more visitors that are unprepared? Perhaps we need to consider the information we share with the visitors and see that they are prepared with a simple and consistent message. One program that is used throughout the northeast and has just 6 simple steps about safe hiking is simply called hikeSafe. <https://www.hikesafe.com/> Visitors are encouraged to be prepared

With knowledge and gear  
To leave your plans  
To stay together  
To turn back  
For emergencies  
To share this code with others

You can actually become a cooperator with this program. You can have volunteers share these messages. You can include them in your printed materials. The FFLA would be happy to take on the task of being a cooperator and get the hikeSafe card template to your volunteer group if you would like.

**Upper Esopus Fire Tower:** On October 3<sup>rd</sup> with less than ideal weather, a small group of people braved the rain and wind and gathered to cut the ribbon on the newest NYS fire tower, the Upper Esopus Fire Tower. Located on the site of the Catskill Visitor Center (formerly the Catskill Interpretive Center) in Mount Tremper, the old Venice Fire Tower from Florida now stands. An 80 foot Aeromotor Model MC 39 was purchased by Davana LLC, taken down in Florida, repaired and re-erected on this site throughout the summer. The official ribbon cutting was followed by the opportunity for people to climb the tower, but there was little view to be seen on this day. Going forward, there are plans to have the tower open when a steward is present. It was great to be able to attend the festivities and chat with builder Dave Vana along with others.



**Sterling Fire Tower:** The Park has installed four stationery windows in the fire tower cab. The four operating windows will be installed shortly. We are so appreciative that this project keeps moving forward!

**Poke O Moonshine:** The Fall newsletter of the Friends of Poke O Moonshine showcased some great things that have been happening there. The completion of some difficult trail projects, new steward guides, and a fabulous account of the stewards summer on the mountain. Take a peak, it is well worth reading! [Click here for link.](#)

**Stissing:** New trail markings at Stissing – a great improvement! If you follow the red, steeper trail you will pass by the remains of the Observer's cabin. If you follow the blue, longer but less steep trail you will pass by old telephone poles. Many thanks to the Friends of Stissing Landmark for this improvement! Thanks to Tracy Rakin for the photo.



**Around the Country:** A couple of great fire tower stories (called lookouts in some other areas) that we came across. [Click here for Montana](#), and [click here for NYTs article.](#)

**Towers for Sale:** Davana LLC of Bloomingdale has several fire towers for sale. You can make inquiries at [firetowerrestoration@gmail.com](mailto:firetowerrestoration@gmail.com).

- 1- 100' Aeromotor MC-39 As is condition
- 1- 60; Aeromotor MC- 39 As is condition
- 1- 54' Aeromotor MC – 39 As is condition
- 1- Aeromotor MC – 39 Top cabin section with 13 feet of legs and stairs
- 1- International Derrick Top cabin section with 24 feet of legs and stairs
- 1- 100' Aeromotor LS 40

Now is your chance to own your own fire tower!

**Book of the month:** Sometimes our “book” differs a bit. This month I came across this [youtube video](#) of the elevated railway in the Catskills. I thought it gave a great view of what spewed out of a train's smoke stack and also a bit of the surrounding landscape, not nearly as forested as today. I believe it gives one a real sense of some of the reasons why forest fires started.

**Trivia Question for September:** What tower had a spigot at the base of the tower? I even included a photograph and this was featured in a previous newsletter. Correct answers were received from Paul H. and James K - The Cross River Fire Tower is correct! A Centennial Patch is on its way to the lucky winners!

**Trivia Question for October:** A question or two came up recently about Kinnie Williams. Who can tell me who this was? FFLA stickers to the winners!

As we see the fire towers end another season- the maps stowed, the hatch locked - I want to thank all of those tireless stewards, both paid and volunteer, who spent time on the mountains caring for the towers and the surrounding forests this year. YOU make a big difference with what you do! So too do the persons behind the scenes involved with the scheduling, the purchasing, the fund raising and the planning on various committees. YOU also make a big difference with what you do! THANK YOU ALL!

**\*Reminder: Spruce and Stillwater Fire Towers are closed for Hunting Season\***

## Calendar

Sunday, October 20, 2019 Your chance to visit the Alma Fire Tower. The 27<sup>th</sup> Annual RidgeWalk & Run will go right by the Alma Fire Tower and it supports a great cause!  
<https://runsignup.com/Race/NY/Wellsville/RidgeWalkRun>

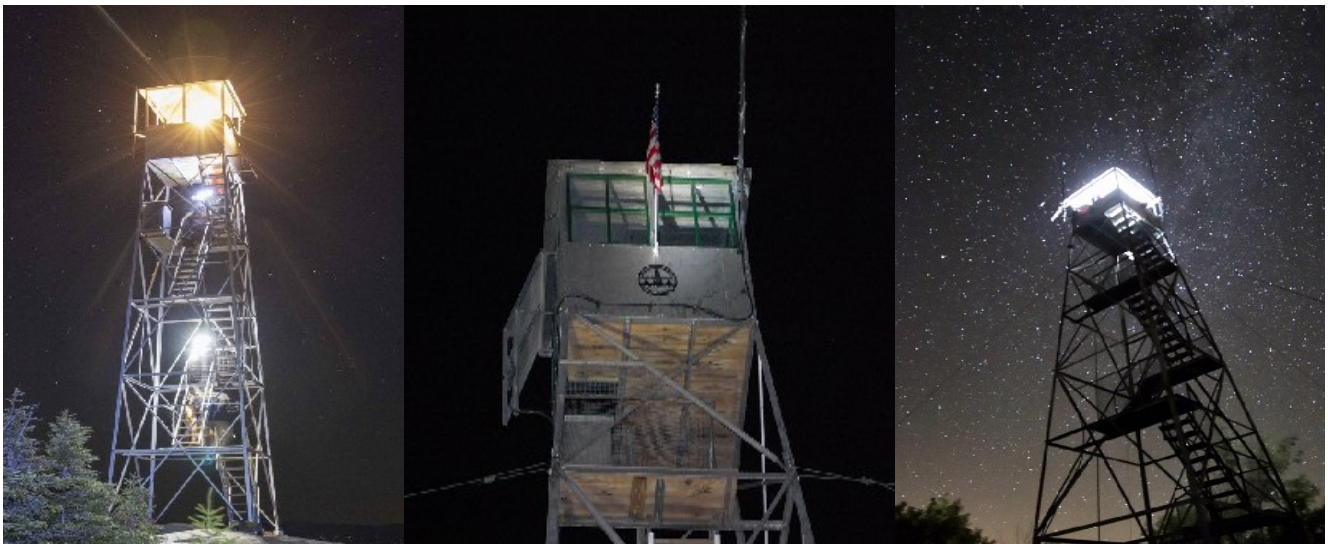
Tuesday, October 29, 2019 is the annual meeting of the Friends of Grafton Lakes State Park. This group is responsible for the Dickinson Hill Fire Tower. You may wish to help them with their work. Contact [friendsofgraftonlakesstatepark@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofgraftonlakesstatepark@gmail.com) for additional information.

Saturday, November 2, 2019: At Poke O Moonshine there will be Water Drainage Construction and Cleanup. Meet at the Observers' Trail parking area at 9AM, 1 mi. south of the Campground on Rte. 9. Please bring a grass rake and/or an iron rake. Contact Steven Bailey, leader.

Saturday, January 25, 2020: At Poke O Moonshine there will be Snowshoe Mammal Tracking with Elizabeth Lee. Meet at 9:30 AM at the Observers' 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 around the State. From Hurricane by Mike Lynch, Stillwater by Harry Peck, and Belfry by Tom Patrick.



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