



# Forest Fire Lookout Association

CA Sierra-Nevada Area Chapter  
48663 Todd Eymann Road, Pinehurst, CA 93641

## *California - Sierra and Nevada CHAPTER* **2012 ANNUAL REPORT**

The California – Sierra and Nevada Chapter includes fire lookouts in the National Forests and Parks of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and all towers in the state of Nevada.

**MEMBERSHIP:** The CA Sierra-Nevada chapter currently has 42 paid members, a gain of 7 from 2011. The end-of-year balance for this chapter was \$1,026.25.

**FISCAL:** Total combined funds Sierra/Nevada Chapter and Subchapters = \$6,185.75  
National Chapter/Membership: \$1,026.25  
Tahoe Subchapter: End of Year Balance: \$3430.00  
Yosemite/High Sierra Subchapter: End of Year Balance: \$1729.50

### **OVERVIEW:**

Fire lookouts still play a roll in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California and in parts of Nevada. Many higher elevation Forest Service lookouts remain and in some cases are thriving - either staffed for fire detection or refurbished and placed in the popular Recreation Rental program. Forest websites now feature fire lookouts describing their history, location and opportunity for recreation. However, almost without exception, the nearby state lookouts located in the foothill region of the Sierra and governed by CAL-Fire have been shuttered, with no plan for utilization, many to be removed.

Each year, this chapter makes contact with a variety of agency personnel who manage fire towers throughout the Sierra/Nevada to determine the status of their lookouts. We ask the following questions: 1. What fire towers do you have standing in your district? 2. Are the towers being used and if so, how? If they are staffed for fire detection, how often are they staffed and is the staff volunteer or paid? 3. What is the condition of your lookouts and are there any plans for rehabilitation, maintenance, etc.? 4. What does the future hold for those lookouts, and are any in danger of being removed?

In most cases, those we talk with are enthusiastic about their lookouts and often have a great deal of knowledge and personal “buy-in” towards the towers on their district. But they also struggle with funding for staffing (lookouts are not the priority) and maintenance (siting re-occurring vandalism, severe weather conditions and old, falling apart buildings). In addition, with the current fiscal state of the federal government, several voiced concern that even more cuts will be made to fire detection programs.

For more information about the status of fire towers in the Sierra Nevada and Nevada, please refer to the separate Sierra – Nevada Tower Status Report 2012.

## ACTIVITIES, UPDATES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Although many fire towers in this chapter have been abandoned, approximately 30 of the roughly 55 known still-standing lookouts are in use - shining examples of perseverance, commitment to tradition and adaptive re-use. For example:

**Pilot Peak and Smith Mountain** Lookouts remain on the Groveland Ranger District, Stanislaus National Forest, and both are actively utilized for fire detection. Over the past several years a consistent and hard-fought effort has been made to improve those facilities for fire watchers who work there and to prevent decrepitude of the structures themselves. As lead Fire Protection Officer Paul Dettman so succinctly put it, “We are striving to improve what we have so that the lookouts are not in danger of removal.” On the Tahoe National Forest, although several of their fire towers are no longer in use for fire detection, volunteers and the Forest Service have made great strides restoring lookouts for recreational use: first with Calpine, more recently with Sardine and currently with the ongoing **Grouse Ridge** restoration project. Fire towers on the Eldorado National Forest are featured on their forest website, creating public awareness while preserving the unique role lookouts played in history.

Fire lookouts are still an important fire detection tool on the Sierra National Forest with five of their 8 remaining lookouts actively staffed throughout fire season. One of those lookouts – **Miami** - is maintained and staffed by a volunteer organization who made several improvements to the facility and is experimenting with the latest technology in order to better pinpoint lightning strikes and subsequent fires.

On the Sequoia National Forest, the non-profit Buck Rock Foundation requested and received \$28,700.00 from the Kern and Tulare Counties Resource Advisory Committee to rehabilitate 1920's era **Buck Rock Lookout** on the Hume Lake Ranger District. Partnering with the Forest Service and working with local contractors and over 40 volunteers, the Foundation accomplished the goals of the project, restoring the original interior and exterior siding, rehabbing the windows, upgrading the electrical system, replacing a section of the stairway and improving the functionality of the facility for staff and visitors.

Buck Rock Lookout is newly featured on a website and in a separate publication called Tulare County Treasures. The Buck Rock Foundation sponsored the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Open House, Barbeque and Blessing at Buck Rock Lookout over Labor Day Weekend, with well over 600 people signing the guest book at the top of the rock. This growing and successful event goes a long way to get the public excited about fire lookout preservation and to educate visitors about fire ecology and fire prevention. The Foundation again partnered with the Lindsay Unified School System to bring 120 under-served children from the San Joaquin Valley on a field trip to Buck Rock and local sequoia groves where they received instruction from naturalists, fire lookouts and fire fighters.

The Foundation continues to provide a comprehensive training program for paid and volunteer lookouts each Spring, this year holding the two day event at the Sierra National Forest Supervisors Office and Fresno Air Tanker Base.

The Sequoia National Forest also recently announced receiving approximately \$13,000 to begin the process of rebuilding well-known **Needles Lookout** and will soon begin the planning process. The hazardous material remaining from the devastating fire of 2011 was removed and the

majority of NEPA was completed during 2012. Unfortunately, there are no plans to continue to staff the recently defunct Mule Peak and Tobias Lookouts – their future remains unknown.

**THREATENED OR REMOVED:** As far as we can determine, there are no lookouts in this chapter that were removed in 2012 or are threatened for removal in the near future, although there is an increase of lookouts no longer in use for fire detection. In recent discussions with fire management throughout this chapter, lookouts are still considered important heritage, fire detection and/or public relation resources, although funding cuts could take a toll.

#### **LOCAL CHAPTERS:**

- **Tahoe Chapter of the FFLA** – Local organization in the process of restoring Grouse Peak Lookout in the Tahoe National Forest. See attached individual report.
- **Yosemite/High Sierra Chapter**, under the direction of FFLA member Jeff May, is dedicated to preserving the lookouts on the Sierra NF and Yosemite National Park. The Miami Volunteer Association is managed under this chapter. See attached individual report.

#### **PLAN OF WORK WITHIN CHAPTER FOR 2013:**

- Complete the rehabilitation of Buck Rock Lookout (SQF)
- Participate in the process for rebuilding the Needles Lookout (SQF)
- Continue the restoration work at Grouse Ridge Lookout (TNF)
- NHLR dedication at Henness Ridge and Crane Flat Lookouts and continued discussion with Yosemite NP to restore Henness Ridge. (YNP)
- Assist the Sierra NF and Sequoia NF to maintain their remaining lookouts by providing resources such as volunteer labor, materials and supplies.
- Rehabilitation and communication improvement projects at Miami, Shuteye and Signal Lookouts (SNF)
- Work with Kings Canyon National Park to make improvements to Park Ridge Lookout (KCNF)
- Buck Rock Open House – Labor Day weekend, September 1, 2013.
- Ongoing outreach at community events and lookout towers.
- Recruit volunteers to help staff towers not already staffed with paid employees. Provide a training program for those volunteers.
- Encourage advocacy and involvement.
- Consider producing an electronic newsletter for members of this chapter.

Respectfully submitted,

*Kathy Ball Allison*  
CA Sierra/NV Chapter Director

**Additional Lookout Inventories Follow:**

## Fire Towers in California/Sierra Nevada

Towers in this chapter include National Forest and National Park Service fire towers located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains south of Highway 80.

\* Indicates NHLR Listing

### ELDORADO NATIONAL FOREST

1. Alder Ridge\* – Recreation Rental, regularly maintained. *Placerville RD*
2. Armstrong Hill– Abandoned. Hwy 88. Not regularly maintained. *Amador RD*
3. Bald Mountain\* – Staffed 7 days with FS employee, maintained. Recent improvements include – vaulted toilet, safety improvements. *Georgetown RD*
4. Baltic Peak\* – Abandoned. Decommission granted through Forest Service channels. Removed. To be relocated to Gold Bug Park. *Placerville RD*
5. Big Hill\*- Staffed as needed. Regular maintenance. *Pacific RD*
6. Bunker Hill\* – Abandoned. Boarded up and closed, no vehicle access, not staffed. *Pacific RD*
7. Leak Springs – Staffed with FS employee. *Amador RD*
8. Lookout Mountain – Removed (mid-2000's?)
9. Robbs Peak\* – Recreation Rental. Regularly maintained. *Pacific RD*
10. Slate Mountain- Removed 2003 *Georgetown RD*

### INYO NATIONAL FOREST

1. Bald Mountain – Was staffed on a regular basis until 2011. Staffed in 2012 on an emergency only basis. Same plan for 2013. Regularly maintained as of 2012.

### SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST

1. Baker Point\* – Abandoned and needs repair – Operational management transferred from Western Divide RD to Kern River RD.
2. Bald Mt\* – Staffed 7 days with FS/BLM employees. Regularly maintained. *Kern River Ranger District.*
3. Breckenridge\* – Staffed 5 days with FS employees. *Kern River RD*
4. Buck Rock\* – Staffed 7 days: 5 days w/USFS employee and 2 days with BRF volunteers. Major rehabilitation *Hume Lake RD*
5. Delilah\* – Staffed with BRF volunteers. Recently rehabilitated. *Hume Lake RD*
6. Jordan Peak\* – Staffed 5 days with USFS employee. Regularly maintained. *Western Divide RD*
7. Mule Peak\* – Not staffed 2011, 2012. *Western Divide RD*
8. Oak Flat\* – Recreation Rental. *Kern River RD (Reservations: 760-379-5646 x-514)*
9. Tobias\* – Not staffed 2011, 2012. *Western Divide RD*
10. The Needles\* – Destroyed 2011. Plans to rebuild. *Western Divide RD*

## SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST

1. Bald Mountain – Abandoned and vandalized. FS talk of rebuilding and OHV clubs adopting and caretaking lookout. *High Sierra RD*
2. Fence Meadow\* - Staffed 5 days a week with FS employee. Recent rehabilitation. *High Sierra RD*
3. Goat Mountain\* - Abandoned. Needs maintenance. *Bass Lake RD*
4. Miami Mountain\* - Staffed with volunteers. Regularly maintained. *Bass Lake RD*
5. Mt Tom\* - Staffed 5 days a week with FS employee. Recent and ongoing rehab. *High Sierra RD*
6. Musick Mtn. – Not staffed. Used as a communications site. *High Sierra RD*
7. Shuteye – Staffed 7 days with FS employees. Scheduled for facilities maintenance 2012. Needs road work. *Bass Lake RD*
8. Signal Peak – Staffed 7 days with FS employees. Recent rehab. *Bass Lake RD*

## STANISLAUS NATIONAL FOREST

1. American Camp – Abandoned. No recent information.
2. Duckwall – Emergency Use Only Vandalism issues. Needs repair, esp. wood stairway) Considered a good location for detection. *Miwok RD*
3. Mt Elizabeth – Staffed with FS employee. Regular maintenance. *Miwok RD*
4. North Mountain – Abandoned. Cabin and tower may still be standing, but it is not in use. In 2008, the North Fire burned near/around the lookout and it is not confirmed that the lookout survived. *Groveland RD*
5. Pilot Peak – Staffed 7 days a week with FS employee. Regular maintenance. *Groveland RD* Working on making improvements, upgrading to electrical system using solar panels and batteries. Installed 1200 gallon tank water system with shower using a water tender. Fuels reduction around site.
6. Smith Peak – Staffed with FS employee. Regular maintenance. Updated catwalk and installed a new roof. Tower girders showing rust, will mitigate. Putting a scope on the firefinder. Fuels reduction around site. *Groveland RD*
7. Trumbull\* - Abandoned, threatened by the Motor Fire 2011, but protected and saved. Trail improved 2012, plans to make into a recreation rental put on hold. Tower heavily vandalized. *Groveland RD*
8. Woods Ridge – Abandoned. Cabin and tower standing but not in use. *Groveland RD*

## TAHOE NATIONAL FOREST

1. Babbitt Peak\* - Staffed with FS employee. Needs repair. *Sierraville RD*
2. Calpine\* – Recreation Rental, regular maintenance. *Sierraville RD*
3. Duncan Peak\* – Staffed with USFS employee. Regular maintenance.
4. Martis Peak\* – Staffing unknown. Owned by USFS, managed by CAL-Fire (*Truckee RD*)

5. Grouse Ridge\* – FFLA Tahoe Chapter currently restoring lookout.
6. Sardine\* – Restored; Recreation Rental to open 2013. *Sierraville RD*
7. Saddleback\* – Staffed with contract lookout. Regular maintenance. *Downieville RD*
8. Sierra Buttes\* – Abandoned. Talk of decommissioning – At Truckee conference we had word that they had received a RAC Grant for Restoration. No plans to remove.
9. Verdi – Abandoned. No plans to remove. *Truckee RD*

#### **TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST**

1. Leviathan\* – Standing, not staffed.

#### **SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK**

1. Milk Ranch – Abandoned for fire detection 1996. Utilized for communications. Looking for maintenance support. (FMO John Goss 559-565-3162)

#### **KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARK**

1. Park Ridge\* – Staffed with Buck Rock Foundation volunteers. Regularly maintained although needs a new ceiling and new floor. (FMO John Ziegler 559-565-4337)

#### **YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK**

1. Crane Flat\* – Restored. This lookout is now open to the public as an interpretive site but is not staffed as such. It is still used on occasion as a fire detection location during lightning busts.
2. Henness Ridge\* – Abandoned. Facilities maintenance survey completed and plans to make improvements underway.

Notes:

Research for this report was accomplished in cooperation with fire management personnel who took the time to discuss fire detection on their specific districts. All were enthusiastic in their support of fire lookout preservation, with several mentioning the increasing importance of staffing fire towers for the purpose of public relations and heritage resource preservation. Although there are many towers not in use, there are no known plans to remove any of the remaining standing lookouts.

References included individual forest websites and [www.californialookouts.weebly.com](http://www.californialookouts.weebly.com).

Addendum (Research from January 2013)

## **PLUMAS NATIONAL FOREST**

1. Argentine – In bad disrepair with “hardly anything left”. FS personnel would be very interested in community involvement, adoption and preservation of the lookout.
2. Black Mountain – Recently restored with grand opening 2011; Recreation Rental
3. Dixie Mountain – Staffed, regular maintenance
4. Kettle Rock – Unstaffed and used for communications. Cab has been vandalized.
5. Mills Peak – Staffed; recently renovated.
6. Mt. Hough – Staffed, regularly maintained.
7. Pike County – Staffed, regularly maintained.
8. Pilot – Not staffed (due to low fire occurrence). In good condition. FS personnel would be interested in community involvement, adoption and preservation of lookout.
9. Thompson – Staffed, regularly maintained.
10. Red Rock – Near Lassen border Hasn’t been staffed since Moonlight Fire. May staff in the future.

## REFERENCES:

Sequoia National Forest; Hume Lake RD – Kathy Allison, 559-336-2366  
Western Divide and Hot Springs RD – Robert Sanders, FMO 559-539-2607  
Kern River RD – Bart ? 760-376-3781  
Sierra National Forest – High Sierra RD – Shelby Charley (Fence) and Belinda McCandliss (Mt Tom) 559-855-5355  
Stanislaus National Forest – Groveland RD – Paul Dettman (FPO) 209-962-7825 x568  
Miwok – Bonnie Stevens 209-586-3234 x 621  
Ken advocate for lookouts. 530-647-5459.  
Eldorado – SO 530-622-5061  
Pacific – 530-644-2349  
Placerville – 530-644-2324  
Georgetown – 530-333-4312 Luke Minton  
Amador – 209-295-4251  
  
Inyo – SO 760-873-2400  
White Mountain RD 760-873-2500  
  
Plumas – SO 530-283-2050 Pete Duncan ext 7831  
Beckworth – 530-836-2575  
Feather River – 530-534-6500  
Mt Hough-530-283-0555 Randy Jennings

Updated 1/2013

## Nevada Fire Towers

5 total lookouts: 3 standing, and 2 still actively staffed.

**ELLA MT. LO** - BLM, Ely, NV District - built 1964 - 2 story –Built 1964; T 6S R 67 E Sec 2; **Still actively staffed, regularly maintained.** USGS recently changed the name of the mountain to Elle. However, the lookout remains “Ella”.

**MCCLELLAN PEAK LO** - Built early 1930s by USFS, transferred to BLM in 1963, last staffed 1970, destroyed 1971.

**PEAVINE PEAK LO** - Built originally by Tahoe NF, later staffed by Nevada Division Of Forestry for a while, then abandoned in 1964 - was still standing in 1972. No longer standing, unsure of when it was removed.

**YELLOW PEAK LO** - BLM, Susanville, CA District, Washoe County NV, Sheldon Hart Wildlife Refuge – T45S R 21E Sec 9; Built in 1981, 9x9; **Still actively staffed, regularly maintained.**

**ZEPHYR POINT LO** - Built 1931 by Eldorado NF, later transferred to Toiyabe NF, later loaned to Nevada Division of Forestry then returned to Toiyabe NF, then later transferred to Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit – no longer used for fire, but still standing and used as a communications site.