

## **Forest Fire Lookout Association New York State Annual Report for 2016**

The New York State chapter ended the year with 53 members, an increase of 11 members. Of those, 20 are plus members. The chapter has an account balance of \$1165.22. 35 of the State's fire towers are on the NHLR (National Historic Lookout Register) list.

The Chapter sponsored the Northeastern Conference in Keene, NY September 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>. 8 Fire tower visits were scheduled. The conference opened with remarks from Chairman Argow who was followed by 7 different presenters; Friends of Hurricane Fire Tower, Friends of St. Regis Fire Tower, NYSDEC Forester Tate Connor, Dave Vana of Davana LLC, Larry Gordon of Cornell Hill, Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower and David Thomas-Train of Friends of Poke O Moonshine. The conference also included special guests from Utah, where USFS personnel Mac and Nathan and 9 carrier pigeons joined us. Those in attendance at the conference went to Belfry fire tower following the presentations where Mac explained how they use the pigeons in their educational presentations. The pigeons would carry a message with the location of a smoke from a tower Observer to a Ranger. The Ranger could then send personnel to fight the fire. We released the birds and have heard that 2 of them did return to Utah. We then visited the Adirondack History Museum where a fire tower has been erected at the museum using two other towers that were dismantled. There are great views from the fire tower and it makes a great place to showcase other fire tower items that were on display. The conference was well attended with close to 50 people from ages 13 to 82 in attendance from 8 different states. The food was delicious and the evening fire was perfect for swapping stories. We also had a visit from the local PBS affiliate and that did a nice segment on fire towers.

A \$500.00 FFLA grant was issued to Thompson Park Fire Tower in Watertown. The fire tower is located in the Thompson Park Zoo and is a community educational exhibit on the grounds. It was the former New Boston fire tower and was moved to the park in 1999. It is in a location that is family friendly and very accessible. The park receives over 50,000 visitors per year! Work was completed in the spring despite some challenges with the weather.

<http://www.watertowndailytimes.com/news03/renovations-of-fire-tower-at-new-york-state-zoo-at-thompson-park-complete-20160505>

### **Individual Tower Updates**

Restoration projects occurred on several towers in 2016. Two towers officially reopened to the public. Stillwater fire tower reopened on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and St. Regis held a soft opening on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Work projects continue on Hurricane and Sterling Forest, though the later had a break in activity due to a change in management at the park. Work at Sterling is approved and slated to begin in 2017. Hurricane is open to the hiking public and plans are well underway to finish work in 2017. New agreements were signed with Berry Hill and Lyon mountain. We anticipate Rock Rift work to begin in 2017. The Maurice D Hinchey Catskill Interpretive Center (MDHCIC) was allotted \$994,000.00 by the State of New York to complete several projects, including the building of a fire tower and Observer's cabin. No word has yet been received regarding the plans for 2017 but we are hopeful that will occur.

We were fortunate to visit the tallest fire tower in the state in DeRuyter. This tower was previously on Swancott Hill and is 99'9" tall. The former Moosehead Mountain fire tower was re-erected in Brooklyn in October by our very own Dave Vana of Davana LLC. Past FFLA State Director, Fred Knauf reported he was able to visit an old tower that is still standing at the Cattaraugus- Alleghany BOCES center.

Unfortunately, we did have one loss. Tom Vrooman reported that the 80 foot Ingraham Hill fire tower was taken down in October. We have had reports of a couple of other towers that are in poor condition. Conversations have begun with the NYSDEC to try to save them.

### **Fire Activity**

New York was very short on snow cover in the winter of 2015/2016. Add to that a lack of rain fall and we had a pretty serious fire season that went from early Spring right through until November when some rains finally fell.

The Sam's Point Ridge fire occurred in April 2016 with just over 2000 acres burned. The cause of the fire has not yet been released, though it appears to have started along a hiking trail. The fire burned for one week under difficult conditions with high winds, warm temperatures and low humidity. It occurred in the area where High Point fire tower once stood and would likely have surrounded the structure if it was still there.

Harriman experienced two fires in November of 2016, one which burned 100 acres and another 440 acres. The fire burned for several days and caused heavy smoke conditions in some nearby heavily populated towns, but no dwellings were burned. The fire burned up and over Tom Jones mountain where a fire tower once stood.

The Bearcub fire on Peacock Mountain in the Adirondacks burned for 5 days in a very remote location. It is believed to have been caused by a campfire that was not properly extinguished.

### **Chapter Activities**

We did get our Chapter Facebook page up and running as planned. We currently with 67 members. Interesting conversations and information is shared through this medium. It seems a very worthwhile endeavor.

Our Monthly newsletter continues. The newsletter goes out electronically to most, but it is also posted on the facebook page and mailed to those members who request it.

Local promotions were done by various groups as well as the state chapter. In addition to the PBS segment in Plattsburgh, there were literally dozens of articles written in local publications regarding fire towers, restoration projects and hikes to fire towers.

### **Goals for 2017**

There is much to be done in 2017. We hope to add several towers to the NHLR, collaborate with new DEC partners and organizers, meet with local Friends Groups, and visit more towers. We plan to do more public outreach (one slide show already planned with the Glens Falls ADK Chapter), attend Centennial Celebrations with nearly a dozen towers turning 100 this year, and we hope to hold our first annual picnic.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Rankin New York State Director