

2011 Maine Annual Report

The year 2011 was a very active year with respect to tower activities. We saw our first significant increase in tower removals. Unfortunately, 2 of which were the last 2 remaining 1905 tower sites. Restoration efforts continue to be burdened by liability issues and the lack of a liability insurance policy. This will continue to plague the chapter and will hinder on-summit projects. Although we did have removals this year, some good news was that some of these removed towers will move to a location to be preserved in some way. We will work in 2012 with these organizations to assist on those projects.

We continued with research and archive collection, including the scanning of 1250+ Fire Lookout photos. We also made several visits to Maine archival sites, continuing the search for lookout history. We continued to keep the Maine tower inventory up to date as there were changes, new discoveries and updates. The findings are below –

2011 Tower Survey

Data as of 12/31/2011

There were 4 towers lost this year (Big Moose, Mount Blue, Bigelow, and May Mountain) and 1 cab removal (Wesley).

Summary:

Total Known Tower Sites – 143
Total Towers Still Standing – 60
Total Towers Gone or Removed – 83

Of the 60 Standing Towers:

Standing Steel Only, No Cab – 19
Standing Steel Converted to Observ. - 6
Standing Steel and Cab – 34
Standing Wooden Enclosed – 1

Average Condition of the 34 Standing Towers with Cabs:

Good Condition – 16
Fair Condition – 10
Poor Condition – 7
Bad Condition – 2

The full tower summary list can be found on the FFLA Web Site on the Towers page under the Maine section. We will continue to update these lists as new information is found.

Tower Losses – There were 4 –

Big Moose Mountain, removed as part of the MSCommNet Project. Moved to NREC Greenville for rebuilding.

Mount Blue, removed as part of the MSCommNet Project. Tower was not salvageable. A new fire-tower look-alike will be built onsite to house radio equipment.

Bigelow Mountain, burned on site as part of the Maine Parks and Land Flagstaff Area Management plan. Primary reasons cited were Liability issues, Continued vandalism, Wildland issues, and Proximity to sensitive alpine vegetation.

May Mountain, removed as part of the MSCommNet Project. Tower was not salvageable.

Planned Removals – The following towers may be removed in 2011:

1. **Mount Abraham** tower is still being recommended for removal by the Maine State DOC. The old watchman's camp was removed this past summer 2011.
2. **West Kennebago** tower will be removed to make way for the new MSCommNet Radio tower. The landowner will not allow both to coexist, so the Fire Tower will be removed. This tower will be moved to the Maine Forest Service District Office in Lower Cupsuptic Township
3. **Norway Bluff** tower will be removed to make way for the new MSCommNet Radio tower. This tower will be moved and preserved at the Ashland Logging Museum
4. **Johnston Hill** tower will be removed at the request of the landowner.

MSCommNet Project

The MSCommNet project is a statewide radio upgrade initiative that will affect certain mountain top summits and fire tower structures. FFLA has worked with the state to understand the impact of the project and to help provide guidance to historic structures. We have been working all year with their project office on many of the removal and move projects. We will continue in this role well into 2012.

Membership

Current membership in ME is at 19 members. Membership has been flat. There still remains a large percentage of people that we work with (enthusiasts, former lookouts, etc) that are still not members. Will step up attempts to recruit them as members.

NHLR

11 Total Entries

There were no new NHLR nominations for 2011. We lost Big Moose Mountain (Squaw Mountain) ME #3 in October.

Research / Archives

We continued this past year with significant research on tower sites. Worked with various organizations to provide history and background data on towers and tower sites. Made 2 visits to state archival facilities and located additional info on lookout history.

I visited Mark Haughwout (FFLA Director Emeritus) in February and he graciously allowed me to borrow over 1250+ Fire Lookout photos from his past Maine trips. These photos chronicle site visits from 1989 through 2002. We were able to scan all of these into the Maine archives.

Liability Challenges in Maine

We continue to hold on restoration projects on state owned/leased land until we can get private liability insurance. There is still a remote possibility to get coverage under an existing state liability plan.

Activities

Big Moose Mountain (Squaw Mountain) Project

Based on the deteriorating condition and the lack of ability to do work on the summit (liability issues), we have been working with the State and NREC all year on an appropriate alternate plan. It was agreed by a local group in Greenville (NREC - Natural Resource Education Center) that they would accept the tower at their new visitor center on RT15 in Greenville. On 10/12/2011 crews from the Maine Forest Service flew the Big Moose Fire tower off the summit and down to the RT15 property. We will work with the Natural Resource Education Center in the coming year and assist with the development of a restoration plan.

Deboullie Mountain

Deboullie Mountain was a planned location for a radio tower that would have removed the Deboullie Fire tower. After much examination for other options, the State has selected another site and the Deboullie tower will not be removed as part of this initiative. The following is the update from the Maine OIT Project Office:

Deboullie Mountain has been the home to a (non-operational) forest lookout tower and is also an operational State of Maine public safety radio communications site.

The MSCommNet project is a consolidation and modernization of the State's numerous and outdated radio systems. One of the guiding principles of site selection was to continue to use existing sites, generally for two reasons ...

- 1. **Technical.** The existing operational sites that have persisted throughout the State provide the best geographical radio coverage (otherwise they would have been discontinued as with other subprime sites)*
- 2. **Aesthetics.** Continuing to use existing operational sites reduces the total tower "footprint" throughout the state; avoiding the creation of developing new openings on mountaintops*

Various individuals and organizations were not in favor of the continuing use of the Deboullie Mountain site for public safety radio communications; therefore, the MSCommNet Project Office sought an alternate location in the area that would provide similar local geographic coverage, as well as interconnectivity to the statewide system.

Alternate site acquisition was a challenging and lengthy process and we have now acquired and will develop an alternate site, which is south of Deboullie in the vicinity of the Chase Ponds area in T14 R9 WELS.

Mount Blue

Construction has been ongoing on the new fire tower look-alike up on Mount Blue in Avon. The old steel remains of the fire tower were removed early September. FFLA investigated a new home for the steel, but because it was only 2 sections of steel and did not have any stairs, there were no takers. The tower will be sent to scrap.

As of early December, the Mount Blue site is mostly constructed. There were delays in construction due to weather and short days. Currently, the tower structure has been flown into place, but the site will not be complete until 2012. Once complete, the summit will again be open to hikers who will be able to access the new observation deck!

Until the summit is open, the State would ask that everyone stay clear of all construction areas until the project is complete and safe.

West Kennebago and Norway Bluff Towers

Over the summer we were involved with several Section 106 reviews with the Maine State Historic Preservation Office. We provided input and historic data as part of the review process. The initial analysis was that these tower removals would have an adverse effect on these historic properties. However, due to project requestor and landowner action timings, these removals were deemed allowed in the end. On 9/9/2011, the Maine State Historic Preservation Office concluded an extensive review of the West Kennebago and Norway Bluff Tower sites. Based on that review, both towers will be removed to make way for new Communication Towers.

In trying to provide some preservation for these towers, it has been agreed to that these towers will be saved/preserved in the following locations -

Norway Bluff - to be preserved at the Ashland Logging Museum

West Kennebago - to be moved to the Maine Forest Service District Office in Lower Cupsuptic Township

Bigelow Mountain

The lookout on Mount Bigelow was burned by Maine Parks and Lands on 4/15/2011. This is our second and last loss of a 1905 lookout site. The removal having been on BPL's master plan for years, was a great loss to many. After an extensive review, it was determined that there was no opposition in the many public hearings. FFLA could have done more, but lacked the proper local presence.

Southern Maine Activities and Status

All 3 volunteer towers in York County (Aggie, Ossipee, and Hope) have continued to operate during 2011. The towers continue to be most active during the dry spells. This year, the Maine Forest Service, who has been supporting these towers from a maintenance perspective since 1992, has indicated that they cannot continue to sustain maintenance on these towers. The state is willing to give these towers to the towns or organizations that have the means to support them. As such, there are multiple discussions going on, each with their own story.

Aggie

The tower is still manned by volunteers of the York Fire Department. Because there has not been much of a forest fire season over the last year, consequently manning has been spotty. There are some repair issues with the structure, which have been identified by the MFS. Due to MFS wanting to unload the tower, the whole issue may be turned over to the Town of York at some point. More discussions will be had in the spring.

Mount Hope

Mt. Hope was used very little this year. The days we had help available were for the most part either rainy or followed a rainy day. We go into year 2011 with one (1) volunteer (John Heseltine), which means we will only be operating two days a week. Efforts will be made to find some added help, but past efforts have proved fruitless. This will be John's last year on Mount Hope as he is retiring from the lookout business.

Ossipee Hill

Ossipee Hill Fire Tower Watchman, Jason was in the tower 76 days in 2011. He had many visitors (families, school classes, hikers) who hiked the mountain, but didn't actually climb the tower. He interacted with other towers when available on identifying smoke locations, but otherwise pinpointed alone. The Tower needs repair work and the Town of Waterboro is trying to decide if it is worth repairing (of course- we all think so) along with most of the town. Ossipee Hill Fire Tower is a valuable resource to the York County, State of Maine and State of New Hampshire of York. Watchman Jason will be celebrating his 20th as tower watchman in 2012.

Other Activities

We provided input (trail descriptions, directions, and tower info) to the Maine Appalachian Trail Club's effort to update the Maine Mountain Guide to version 10.

Made several tower site visits with FFLA Member Bill Spach. Trips included Big Spencer Mountain, Moxie Bald Mountain, White Cap Mountain, Kelly Mountain, Pleasant Pond Mountain, Big Moose (Squaw) Mountain, and Barren Mountain.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Cobb
Maine Director