



2020 Indiana/Illinois Chapter Annual Report Forest Fire Lookout Association

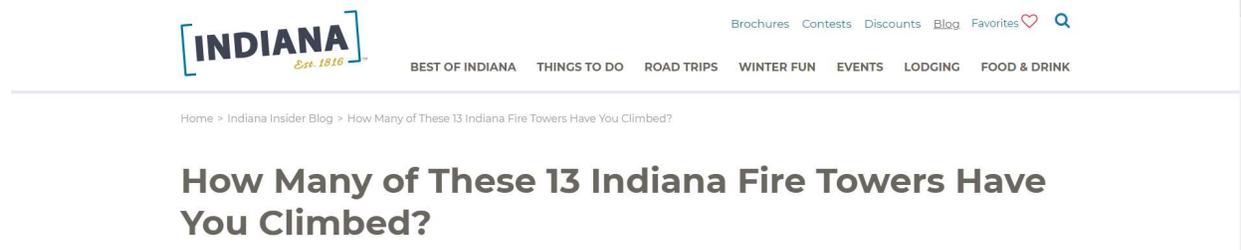
MEMBERSHIP: The Indiana Chapter has 5 current members although one member lives in Missouri. The Illinois Chapter has 6 current members. Two of the Illinois members were students and graduated and moved out of state. The balance for the two states is \$144.

CURRENT CHAPTER OFFICERS: Teena Ligman, Director

Illinois Area Representative: Joe Mirabelli

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES:

Indiana Tourism launched a series of outdoor challenges to encourage people to get out and travel safely and still see local sites. The site at <https://visitindiana.com/blog/index.php/2019/07/02/indiana-fire-towers/> includes fire towers.



The text on the site went on to educate people about lookout towers:

Before traveling, be sure that you follow all guidelines laid out by Indiana's [Back on Track plan](#). Avoid large groups and [take precautions recommended by the CDC](#) to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. DNR properties that are currently open can be found [here](#). For more information about Back on Track Indiana, click [here](#).



It's time to take a trip to one of 13 amazing Indiana fire towers! These feats of engineering are incredible to look at, challenging to climb and provide breathtaking views of Indiana's forest lands.

The page proceeds to describe each of the featured 13 towers with beautiful photographs of each tower. The towers include:

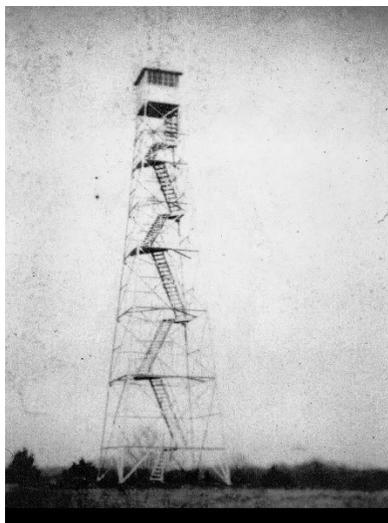
- Henryville Tower (Clark State Forest)
- Ferdinand Tower (Ferdinand State Forest)

- O'Bannon Woods Tower (O'Bannon Woods State Park)
- Skyline Drive (Jackson-Washington State Forest)
- Mason Ridge (Morgan Monroe State Forest)
- McCormick Tower (McCormick's Creek State Park)
- Hartwell Tower (Pike State Forest)
- Winamac Tower (Tippecanoe River State Park)
- Lincoln City Tower (Lincoln State Park)
- Ouabache Tower (Ouabache State Park)
- Hickory Ridge (Hoosier National Forest)
- Lilly Loukout (Brown County State Park)
- Willow Valley Tower (Martin State Forest)

McCormicks Creek Lookout Tower is BACK!!

I've been writing about the progress on this tower for the last few years but now it is complete, including the plaza at the base and it would make any member of FFLA proud.

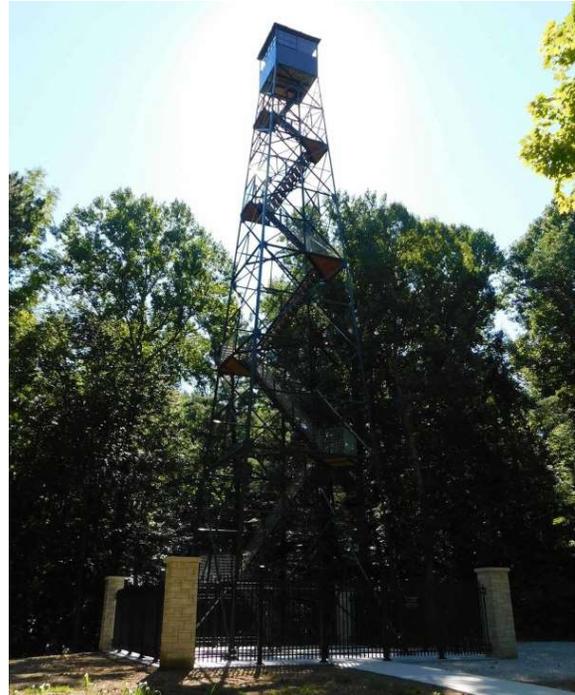
Shown at right, Joanna Beasley Suitors gets a look around the treetops in the newly opened fire tower at McCormick's Creek State Park.



The fire tower had been closed since the early 1980s. The Friends of McCormick's Creek raised over \$100,000 to restore the 86-foot tower. "They started small and then shot for the stars," says Naturalist Wyatt Williams. The 105 steps to the top are easy to navigate. The plaza underneath the tower is entirely new. Even if you decide not to climb the tower, the view from underneath is impressive. Though 86 feet seems short by western standards, interpretive photos show why 86 feet was adequate at the time. There were no trees when the tower was built in 1935 on the highest hill around.

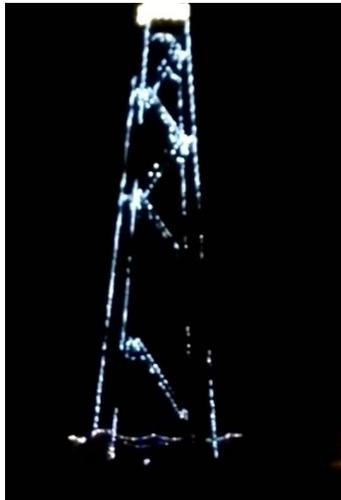
The tower arrived as a kit and was put together that winter by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The recently completed plaza, shown in the photo to right, at the base of the tower was the last component that was completed in the restoration and keeps the tower and the public safe.



Ouabache Lookout Tower Christmas Light Show ups the Wattage!

For the last few years Ouabache State Park has operated a Christmas Light show in their campground. But the lookout tower is the heart of the spectacular event. Called the Wonderland of Lights it runs nightly from 6 to 9 p.m. from Dec 1 through Dec. 31. This drive-through event includes a synchronized light show at the park's Fire Tower Plaza and more than 40 displays in the campground. A \$5 fee is charged per carload which goes to fund park projects.



This year the Friends of Ouabache SP group partnered with the First Bank of Berne to expand the fire tower spectacular to three different light shows, one presented Mondays through Thursdays, another one Fridays through Sundays, and a special edition to be presented on Christmas Eve.

Normally Santa waits at the tower and greets children but with Covid, instead, guests were invited to drop letters into Santa's mailbox with a self-addressed stamped envelope and receive an answer back. Santa's mailbox was open until Dec. 20.

A volunteer has choreographed a light show to music each year so that the lights flash to the beat of the music and different lights change throughout the musical piece. I'm told it's a work of art. People flock to tour the campground and then park and watch the lookout tower light show. They said this year people came multiple times to see the different light shows and it was packed on Christmas Eve. The tower has become part of celebrating Christmas around Ouabache State Park and thousands of people come to marvel at the lookout tower's light show each year during the Christmas season. It also makes several thousand dollars for the park!

Trigg Tower in Illinois Undergoing Repairs!

This October, Trigg Tower in Shawnee National Forest closed for repairs to some of the protective fencing atop the tower, a project which will continue into 2021. Constructed in 1938, Trigg is the only remaining tower out of sixteen from Shawnee.

While the tower is otherwise in good shape, structurally, there has been a recent uptick in vandalism, and much of the observation level is covered in graffiti. This may be an opportunity for future volunteer work.



FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES: No financial or fundraising activities in 2020.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2020:

Most of my objectives are carried over from previous years

- I still hope to interview both the widow of the German Ridge towerman and re-interview the Hickory Ridge towerman's widow. I'll write a story for the magazine if I can get good stories from these women. I am hoping they are still alive when I get around to trying to interview them....
- I want to work with Bev Stout, IDNR Fire Prevention Specialist to get school history classes in the communities around lookout towers involved in researching their history. This should help us with the nominations for the towers up for selection for the Register. We also want to get the rest of our towers on the Register so will get classes to research those as well. Primarily I want to get a new generation interested in lookout towers.
- Contact the State Parks and Forests in the state to generate an inventory of needed work on towers and update the information on towers that we currently have.
- Offer to give programs on lookout towers at the parks.
- Compare information on Weebly site: <https://easternuslookouts.weebly.com/indiana.html> to see what information they might have that we do not have on the Hoosier National Forest Lookout Tower site which I've used as the official Indiana lookout tower information site. Also contact that person to let them know of errors they have on their site (one tower on the Indiana list is actually in Pennsylvania, and two towers are listed twice, each with different names for the same tower.) It would be good if all sites with Indiana tower information were consistent and accurate. They did have one tower listed (no longer standing) that I was not aware of.
- In Illinois, Joe is hoping to add the Forest Glen observation tower in eastern Illinois to the historic register
- In Illinois, Joe is also working on identifying former lookout tower sites on IDNR and USFS lands across the state after noticing a discrepancy between descriptions on the national register
- In Illinois, there few little prospects for a tower to be staffed or constructed again, but Joe hopes to update visit reports on all three national register towers and speak with personnel about the importance of preserving the remaining towers

2020 Indiana Tower Statistics:

- Total lookout towers in chapter: 15
- Lookout Towers on National Register 9
- Towers in active service: 0
- Towers in rental program 0
- Towers needing significant repairs Unsure
- Towers hopelessly dilapidated Unsure
- Towers converted to alternate function Many are used for radio/repeaters/antennas
- Towers schedule to be removed None known
- Complete new tower under construction 0

2020 Illinois Tower Statistics

- Total lookout towers in chapter: 4
- Lookout Towers on National Register 3
- Towers in active service: 0
- Towers in rental program 0
- Towers needing significant repairs One (underway)
- Towers hopelessly dilapidated 0
- Towers converted to alternate function None known
- Towers schedule to be removed None known
- Complete new tower under construction 0

Respectfully submitted:

Teena Ligman, Indiana Chapter Chair and Joe Mirabelli, Illinois Area Representative

4 January 2021