



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
2021 Annual Report**

New York State ended the year with 121 members (66 in 2017, 78 in 2018, 89 in 2019, and 99 in 2020). Of those 121 members, 29 were plus members. The numbers reflect 25 new members and 2 who did not renew, increasing by 23 overall.

Our Chapter had an opening balance of \$1153.73 and a closing balance of \$485.72. We received a number of donations during the year which allowed us to continue to build our tool inventory for work projects, to provide our volunteers with the proper safety equipment to address Covid-19 concerns and to provide branded uniform shirts for our 2 Volunteer Steward Programs. We also utilized funds to provide refreshments for our volunteers at our work projects.

Fire activity around the state in 2020 was minimal. None of our towers actively participated in fire spotting activities. There were no rental towers in the state. Standing towers remain unchanged at 73.

I was able to resume fire tower inspection site visits, completing 33 visits, including a couple of lost lookout locations. Several community meetings regarding new fire towers were held. All of these except one were done via Zoom meetings.

Work projects were able to resume in 2021 and included Observer's cabin work at Blue Mt, Kane Mt and fire tower work at Pillsbury. Painting over of graffiti at different sites occurred throughout the season as needed.

At Blue Mountain an extensive Observer's cabin restoration was done over the course of several work days by FFLA volunteers and our NYSDEC liaison. On the exterior, all of the siding was replaced and stained, new windows were installed, and new screening was placed around the porch. On the interior, all walls and floors were sanded down and stained and a great deal of caulking and putty work was done to cover over graffiti and to rodent proof the cabin. The multi year commitment to this facility has been a great opportunity for our volunteers to take part in several aspects of restoration. This has not only saved these historic structures, but it also provides housing for a steward who works at the facility. It is unique in that it is one of the few locations in New York State with electricity at the summit. In 2022, we will finish some smaller project around the cabin and tower and perhaps begin some work on the trail.

Kane Mountain Fire Tower cabin received a new roof and a new porch and all of the siding was stained in 2022. This was accomplished as a partnership with the NYSDEC and the FFLA, with funds provided by the DEC and an FFLA grant. NYSDEC personnel did the majority of the work, with FFLA volunteers stepping in to stain the cabin. Now that the facility has been saved, we hope to be able to begin a Steward program at the site and discussions of same will be occurring shortly.

At Pillsbury Fire Tower, completion of replacement of the landing and step boards was completed in 2021. This remote site location has had several challenges, but the FFLA volunteers stepped up to get the work done! The NYSDEC supported our work with the delivery of materials via helicopter. Now

we await the radio crew to come in and install new, updated radio equipment outside of the fire tower cab. Once that is done, we can restore the cab and it can be reopened to the public again!

On August 13th, Swede Mt Fire Tower reopened! Warren County took the lead on this project once the paperwork was completed that transferred the fire tower to the county back in 2018. They restored the tower, put in a new trail and had a grand opening event for what is certain to become an oft visited tower! FFLA volunteers spent lots of time behind the scenes and on the trail and were very pleased to see this project come to fruition!

On September 13th, the Berry Hill Fire tower reopened with a 9-13-21 ribbon cutting ceremony! This has been another long term project for the FFLA who came on board back in 2016 with the signing of an agreement to adopt the Observer's cabin. Our NYSDEC liason had written this into Unit Management Plans back in 1999 and was able to keep the plan moving forward, securing funding and restoring the fire tower! The FFLA Chapter already has a robust volunteer steward program at the site thanks to numerous volunteers.

The Stewardship program continues at the recently refurbished Stillwater Fire Tower where the State Chapter holds the agreement to maintain the tower and trail and provide the steward presence. This year an orientation was held to provide more consistent information to those participating in the program. We had good attendance for this.

Our State Chapter Facebook page now has 1076 members. It is an active place with ongoing weekly mystery photos and historical commentary, a monthly photo contest and many great conversations. Our State Chapter Web page has had 3981 hits to date. We continue to work at keeping it updated. It does get a lot of traffic at the time of the Lighting Event. Most exciting for us, If you google NYS Fire Towers our web page comes up!!!

Monthly newsletter continues to be well received with over 200 recipients electronically and a dozen or so snail mailed.

8th Annual Lighting of the Fire Tower Event on Labor Day weekend was another success!

4 Affiliate Groups; St. Regis, Azure, Friends of Stissing, and Town of Kent.

Looking ahead to 2022, we have several new fire tower projects planned. We hope to see two old towers re-erected and opened to the public and 2 towers that are currently standing restored and opened to the public. We hope we can continue to work safely on our outdoor projects and expand our Steward work to at least 2 new locations. In 2021, we connected with SUNY ESF and Paul Smith's colleges for possible research project for students to map phone lines and Observer's roads to fire towers in NYS. We hope one of these projects may come to fruition. We have submitted 2 VSA applications to NYS for work on 2 more fire towers in addition to the 9 we already have. We hope these will all be approved or renewed in 2022. I still need to spend some time nominating towers for the NHLR, update Lost Lookouts and continue recruiting volunteers and members to assist in all aspects of work at the Chapter.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Rankin, Director NYS Chapter