

Virginia/West Virginia FFLA Chapter Report 2020

Answers provided by VA/WV Chapter Head Krissy Reynolds, husband, Wesley Reynolds; with help from Sam Parker, WV State Parks, & Ricky Butler, VA Dept of Forestry

Tower Statistics:

1. Remaining Towers:
 - a. Virginia has 48 confirmed remaining towers.
 - i. Most are privately owned or remain in the ownership of VA Department of Forestry. The ones that are owned by VDOF are in disrepair & most local VDOF offices do not know much about them, how to get to them, or if they even exist.
 - b. WV has 20 confirmed remaining towers.
 - i. In vast opposite of Virginia, West Virginia is well aware of their remaining towers. Most are owned by WV Parks.
2. Lookouts in Active Service (Paid or Volunteer):
 - a. Virginia has no towers in active service.
 - b. West Virginia has two towers in active service, Thorny Mountain in Seneca State Forest, as a rental, as well as Red Oak Knob in Monongahela State Forest.
3. Lookouts in Partial Service or Ready Stand-By:
 - a. Virginia has one tower in partial service/ready stand-by. It is Piney Mountain in Appomattox County.
 - b. West Virginia has multiple towers in partial service/ready stand-by. They are Olson Tower, Hanging Rock/Peters Mt Tower, Bickle Knob Tower, & Spruce Knob (not an enclosed tower but is used stand-by for weather service).
4. Rental Lookouts:
 - a. Virginia has none, much to my attempts to convince VDOF that Elliot Knob, Red Oak, & Bald Knob would make wonderful rentals.
 - b. West Virginia currently has one rental tower, which is the aforementioned Thorny Mountain Tower. Red Oak is about to become a rental, as well.
5. Lookouts Converted to Alternate Uses:
 - a. Most of Virginia's East Coast towers are now owned by the Coast Guard or NASA & used as stations & launch pad towers. The other well known converted tower is the Belair Tower, which is the sniper practice range tower at Quantico.
 - b. West Virginia continues to find uses for towers, whether it is at original coordinates, or by moving them to more useful spots. They continue to find rental lookouts as well as update old tower spots as observation desks such as Spruce Knob, the highest point in West Virginia.

6. Lookouts Lost in 2020 or Likely To be Removed Soon:
 - a. Virginia/VDOF has not confirmed what they wanted to remove but didn't in 2020. To my knowledge, the last tower lost was Chancellor II in Spotsylvania County. It was the second tower in that county; both are gone now. The docket this year had them tearing down about a dozen towers in central & eastern shore VA but thankfully COVID has halted that from happening. All the towers that Wes & I have visited in our decade with FFLA remain except Chancellor. I talk to Ricky Butler often & he tries to put off conversations with his superiors as much as possible about deconstruction of towers. He has always vowed to reach out to myself or Keith Argow if he knows of any. The ones they spoke of taking down that I let Keith know about at the beginning of 2020 were Piney Mt, our only semi-active tower, as well as Ark in Gloucester County and Birdnest in Northampton County.
 - b. No towers were lost in WV in 2020. None are likely to be removed.
7. Reports On Ongoing Restoration Projects & Other Activities:
 - a. Virginia as you may have gathered does not actively try to save towers. The best I can do as chapter director is to continue to visit them, photograph & document. VDOF doesn't share WV's love of the lookouts or the desire to use them for anything. I will continue to hike & travel to them, register new ones that may still be remaining (I think we have maybe 11 left undocumented). I would love any input past what I have been given as to help with persuading VDOF that NPS, the Parkway, or Skyline, VA is for Lovers, could benefit from rentals. I value the history of the towers; thus my clinging to them & continue protection of them. I worry when some of the older generation of VDOF is gone I will not have help keeping them.
 - b. West Virginia is currently rehabbing Red Oak Tower to be it's next rental. In addition, Hanging Rock/Peters Mt in Monroe County received new boards, windows, etc this year thanks to their local community & Sam Parker with WV Parks. Lastly, Bickle Knob was able to gain enough local support as well as funding to be maintained so it will continue to stand. The fundraiser began in 2018. A fundraiser to rehab Bald Knob in Cass Scenic Railroad is next on the docket. I was CC'ed on emails with questions about contractors and/or blueprints/help with redoing steps & windows.

End Survey Questions:

Total Number of Chapter Members: We gained nine new members in our VA/WV Chapter!

Members Gained & Lost: We gained five members & lost two members.

Facebook Group: We have 320 followers! It has been a very active year on social media. I attribute most of that to the WV Chapter, as WV Parks & I

bounce posts back & forth about tower rentals, as well as hikes to towers in WV.

While I do believe the pamphlets & website help people find us sometimes, I think that the Facebook page is vital. I am also beginning an Instagram Page as a sister page to our Facebook, since most of our members/followers are avid hikers & find one another there. I can personally say that I check the #firetower hashtag regularly to “check on” towers, & to find things that I might not know of otherwise.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristin M. Reynolds, Chapter Director VA/WV