

## 2017 Indiana Chapter Annual Report Forest Fire Lookout Association

**MEMBERSHIP:** The Indiana Chapter has 6 current members

### **RESTORATION:**

**Ouabache State Park Tower**, Built in 1939, the 100 foot galvanized steel tower affords an unobstructed view of four counties. It was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and used for many years. But in 2015 it was closed by the park due to safety concerns. Yet, it was still an iconic symbol for the small northern Indiana park which had two claims to fame: a small bison herd and the Ouabache Lookout Tower.



When the tower was closed, park officials hoped to repair and open it soon but repairs were estimated at \$75,000 for renovation. Then the Friends of Ouabache State Park got involved. They started a Go Fund Me page and launched a turbo-charged campaign. They hosted events big and small to bring awareness to their cause, with two co-chairs, they gave programs to every civic group and spoke at every event. In

this rural Indiana area, there was almost no group that didn't get involved and help the Friends group. The Friends generated ownership in the Tower by new generations of people and raised the entire amount in just nine months – a task park officials thought would take five years.

They received one \$25,000 donation from the Community Foundation but the rest of the money came from private individuals and small businesses. There were very few large donations. Renovations are now under way and they hope to have the tower complete and open again by Spring 2018.

**McCormicks Creek State Park Tower** – The Friends of McCormicks Creek State Park are very close to meeting their goal to restore their fire tower as well. As of January 1, 2018; they have raised \$84,756.22 toward the \$85,000 needed to restore their tower. This 86' steel structure and metal 7'x7' cab with interior wood panels was constructed in 1935 by Civilian Conservation Corps Company #589. The tower was in service through 1967 and since become a popular visitor destination in the park. The tower was officially listed on the National Historic Lookout Register on November 12, 2008.



Once the rest of the money is raised they group will:

- Prep and paint the entire structure
- Replace the wooden steps and landings to bring them back to their original condition
- Remove and replace the safety wiring around the stair case

- A complete rehabilitation of the cab to remove existing damaged materials and replace in-kind allowing public access inside the cab
- Road improvements to allow better access to the site for workers and construction vehicles
- Clear trees in a 50' radius around the tower to decrease risk of future damage to the structure

The Park Manager also has a long term plan to move the entrance of the park to come in near the lookout tower. Currently the location of the tower is obscure. Unless you hike one of the trails, you will never see it. He wants to make it more visible to all visitors. The new entrance would also be safer when traffic backs up off the highway so he thinks he has a good chance of getting the new entrance approved. The benefit to FFLA is the visibility of the lookout tower to the public!

**ACTIVITIES:** No activities per se though we've talked about possible people to interview and I retired July 31 so have hopes of doing more interviews and work for FFLA!

**PLAN OF WORK FOR 2018:**

- I still hope to interview both the widow of the German Ridge tower man and re-interview the Hickory Ridge tower man's widow. I'll write a story for the magazine if I can get good stories from these women.
- 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 want to get the rest of our towers on the Register so we hope to get classes to research those as well. This will also get a new generation interested in lookout towers.
- Generate an inventory of needed work on towers and update the information on towers that we currently have.

I also plan to go around and speak to any Friends Group that has a lookout tower and hasn't already worked to restore and interpret this resource.

**Respectfully submitted:** Teena Ligman, Chapter Chair  
7 January 2018