

2012 Maine Annual Report

The year 2012 was another active year with respect to tower activities. We saw continuing tower removals though only 2 this year, and one was a relocation to a museum. Restoration efforts continue to be burdened by liability issues and the lack of a liability insurance policy. We will be looking to work with the state under pre-existing policies where possible.

We continued with research and archive collection, including the scanning of many of the Maine Forestry Districts watchman rosters. We also made several visits to Maine archival sites, continuing the search for lookout history. Several friends of the Maine chapter also helped greatly with locating old lookout details and photos.

We continued to keep the Maine tower inventory up to date as there were changes, new discoveries and updates. The findings are below –

2012 Tower Survey

Data as of 12/31/2012

There was 1 tower lost this year (West Kennebago Mountain) and 1 tower relocation (Norway Bluff).

Summary:

Total Known Tower Sites – 143
Total Towers Still Standing – 58
Total Towers Gone or Removed – 85

Of the 58 Standing Towers:

Standing Steel Only, No Cab – 18
Standing Steel Converted to Observ. - 6
Standing Steel and Cab – 33
Standing Wooden Enclosed – 1

Average Condition of the 33 Standing Towers with Cabs:

Good Condition – 14
Fair Condition – 10
Poor Condition – 7
Bad Condition – 2

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

Tower Losses – There were 2 –

West Kennebago Mountain, removed as part of the MSCommNet Project. On Saturday 5/19, the Maine Forest Service was to fly the tower and cab to a gravel pit for the purposes of saving it. The tower was scheduled to be removed in the spring of 2012 to make way for a new communications tower. FFLA was looking for a location to take the tower as an exhibit and had at least one good lead. Unfortunately, it turned out that the steel was too heavy for the Helicopter and it could not be safely lifted. The cab was also too rotted to transport, so the tower had to be cut down in pieces. Ultimately, the tower and cab were sent to scrap as there was no possibility of saving it.



West Kennebago Tower – moments after it was taken down

Norway Bluff, removed as part of the MScCommNet Project. The Tower was moved in 2 phases to the Ashland Logging Museum. Phase 1 was the removal from the mountain on 5/7/2012 and Phase 2 was the actual moving of it to the Museum on 6/13/2012. The museum staff, current and retired Maine Forestry staff all helped to make the move a reality. The final product looks great! There will be a dedication and ribbon cutting in the summer of 2013.



Norway Bluff – almost finished product; October 2012

Planned Removals – The following towers may be removed in 2013:

1. **Mount Abraham** tower is still being recommended for removal by the Maine State DOC. The old watchman's camp was removed in the summer of 2011.
2. **Johnston Hill** tower will be removed at the request of the landowner.

MSCommNet Project

The MSCommNet project is a statewide radio upgrade initiative that has had an effect on many mountain top summits and fire tower structures in Maine. FFLA continued to work this year with their project office on many of the removal and move projects. We expect that this work will slow in 2013 as most of the sites are acquired and being built out currently.

Membership

Current membership in ME is at 20 members. Membership has been relatively flat. We will expand the Maine Chapter into more social media outlets this year in an effort to gain more visibility and potentially more membership.

NHLR

11 Total Entries

There were no new completed NHLR nominations for 2012, but Wadleigh Mountain Tower is in process awaiting State of Maine approval.

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, including the Ashland Logging Museum and the Moosehead Historical Society.

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

Back in 2011, the Natural Resource Education Center (NREC) in Greenville agreed to accept the tower and place it at their new visitor center on RT15 in Greenville. The initial plan was to restore and erect the tower on site as an exhibit. The project has run into serious insurance liability challenges. Currently, the project is on hold pending a new plan that satisfies the insurance carrier. For now, the tower lays on its side in the clearing next to the building.



Big Moose Tower lays in a field next to the NREC facility on RT15 in Greenville

Williams Mountain

FFLA and a local club have been discussing a restoration project for Williams Mountain up in Misery Township. Plum Creek, the current owner of the land and tower, is generally interested in the project, but did not have the resources in 2012 to proceed. Plum Creek is currently fully occupied with the very large Moosehead area development and conservation project that they just closed on earlier in 2012. We will open talks again in spring 2013.

Mount Blue

In July, the new fire tower construction on Mount Blue in Weld was complete, so I set out to hike up and check out this new tower look-alike. In Mount Blue State Park, the 1.6 mile trail leaves at the end of the Mount Blue Road and is moderate for most of the way. Just under half way up, a short trail leaves left to the old watchman's camp which still stands. The camp is in bad shape, but the main structure still stands and can be entered at your own risk. Arriving at the summit, a new fire tower stands alongside a radio building built to resemble a warden's shelter. The tower has a traditional cab on it, with window look-alikes. The cab is not accessible, but holds or disguises 4 microwave antennas. A wrapping staircase leads you to an observation platform which delivers 360 degree views. Previous to this tower, views were limited due to summit growth.



Mount Blue – New Tower Look-Alike

Wadleigh Mountain

FFLA member Dave Merchant is spearheading a restoration effort for the Wadleigh mountain fire tower. A proposal has been written and presented to the State of Maine. It is hoped that the proposal will be accepted and an effort can begin in the spring of 2013.



Wadleigh Mountain Tower in August 2012

Southern Maine Activities and Status

All 3 volunteer towers in York County (Aggie, Ossipee, and Hope) have continued to operate during 2012. The towers continue to be most active during the dry spells.

Aggie

The tower is still manned by volunteers of the York Fire Department. The year 2012 was a slow fire season in these parts, which is good news overall. The state continues to want to transfer ownership of the tower, though talks are slow.

The York Fire Department still maintains control of the tower to date. There was no opportunity to perform maintenance in the tower this past year, though it is hoped that in 2013 stair and window maintenance can be done.

Mount Hope

The Mt. Hope fire season was slow and the tower was used very little this year. There was not many Class 3 or higher days, which is the criteria for going up. This year was John Heseltine's last year of volunteer duty. Not only is John retiring, but he is the last of a group of volunteers that manned Mount Hope tower on their own time. The Sanford Fire Department Call Company, the supporting department for Mount Hope, said that they will look for new volunteers. FFLA will also advertise for volunteers on their web site, but if any reader of this article is interested, please contact Bill Cobb at cobbw@charter.net.

Ossipee Hill

Ossipee tower opened the end of March after very dry winter and early spring. Then the rain started, and didn't get busy again until the middle of June. A total of over 400 people visited the tower as well as moose, bear and two American eagles. Entertained school groups, senior citizens, families and tourists. Closed the tower in the middle of October. 2013 will be fire tower watchman, Jason L'Heureux's 20th year.

Other Activities

Made several tower site visits this past year. Trips included Mount Agamenticus, Borestone Mountain, Big Spencer Mountain, Number 4 Mountain, Kibby Mountain, Soubunge Mountain, Mount Zircon, Streaked Mountain, Mount Blue, Aziscoos Mountain, Mount Katahdin, Doubletop Mountain, Williams Mountain, and Wadleigh Mountain.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Cobb
Maine Director