

2019 Maine Chapter Annual Report

This year, we didn't have any tower losses, but two towers lost cabs. Maine continues to have a largely abandoned, aging tower inventory. We actively seek out candidates in the inventory to attempt restoration projects, but we are often challenged by the lack of liability insurance and other resources. As such, we at a minimum keep track of the inventory on a yearly basis. In that effort, we continue to have a large number of members and friends of the chapter do site visits all over the state. We continue to be encouraged with the commitment of the Northern District of the Maine Public Lands department to repairing many of the fire towers in their district, enabling them to be recreational destinations.

We continued with research and archive collection, including important donations and oral histories. We continue to maintain and grow our chapter Facebook presence and collected a variety of new information from it.

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

2018 Tower Survey

Data as of 12/30/2018

Summary:

Total Known Tower Sites – 144

Total Towers Still Standing – 55

Total Towers Gone or Removed – 89

Of the 55 Standing Towers:

Standing Steel Only, No Cab – 23

Standing Steel Converted to Observation – 7

Standing Steel and Cab – 24

Standing Wooden Enclosed – 1

Average Condition of the 24 standing towers with Cabs:

Good Condition – 11

Fair Condition – 4

Poor Condition – 8

Bad Condition – 3

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

<http://ffla.org/lookouts/me/me.htm>

Membership and Budget

Current membership in ME is at 39 members, the same as last year. We also have over 100 other Facebook friends or folks that help out occasionally with research, trip reports, or tower reports. As in past years, no chapter funds were requested from the FFLA accounts. All expenses were covered by the director as a donation to the chapter.

NHLR

12 Total Entries

Research / Archives

We continued with significant research on tower sites. We received many new leads and information through Facebook and have worked with these folks to gather the information for the archives. We did 1 oral history of past watchman. Worked with various organizations and individuals to provide history and background data on towers and tower sites. Also made several trips to the Maine State Library, the Maine Forest Service and other locations to retrieve archival information and old photos of lookout sites.

Liability Challenges in Maine

We continue to hold on a few restoration projects on state owned/leased land until we can understand if / how we can use the FFLA National liability insurance. We have made no progress getting these answers in 2019.

Facebook Presence

The Maine Chapter Facebook Page continues to do well and has 7304+ followers as of this writing, up 1651 since last year. We continue to keep fresh content on the page, which is a key to keeping interest. We continue to see the below benefits -

- Connecting with many former watchman, yielding a wealth of info
- Connecting with the families of former watchman, yielding a wealth of info
- Provides a good mechanism for communication and outreach
- Is a good research tool
- Has created more exposure for the chapter
- Provides a mechanism to socialize our online membership

We continued to regularly create Facebook advertising campaigns on a quarterly basis to advertise our Newsletter with our online membership link.

Activities

Squaw Mountain Watchman's Camp project

We continue to partner with The Natural Resource Education Center (NREC) based in Greenville Maine, on a project to add a watchman's camp replica at the Greenville Maine Visitors Center. This year, we worked with the volunteer team that built the camp on planning out the interior. The vintage interior was built out, but the camp was not opened yet. We will be populating the camp with 1960 period items this spring/summer with a grand opening being planned for mid-late summer 2020.



The new camp at the Greenville Visitor's Center

Northern Region Towers

The Maine Public Lands Division continued planning for, and implementation of, maintenance on the Round Pond Mountain tower site. Planning for the installation of a new cab is still underway due to difficult access conditions in the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.

There were some new maintenance issues that arose in 2019. The cab loss of Deboullie Mountain tower and continued cab deterioration of Allagash Mountain fire tower. Planning for the Deboullie repair/replacement is underway, but there are no dates on completion. We applaud the commitment of the Maine Public Lands department for their efforts to keep these historic landmarks standing and functional as recreation destinations.



The cab-less Deboullie Mountain fire tower

Grand Lake Stream

The Indian Hill fire tower restoration project was officially initiated by the Downeast Lakes Land Trust this year. Initial planning has started and largely administration tasks and preparation was conducted this year. The Maine Chapter is assisting with historic information for use with historic status discussions and grant writing. The intention of the project is to restore it to its original state and allow visitors.

Mount Agamenticus

The restoration strategy has changed. After much discussion with York town selectmen and leaders in the recreation department, it was decided to re-think the original plan of rebuilding the tower cab on top of the original 1940's steel. There is a new proposal of replacing the entire tower with a modern steel structure, including a publicly accessible observation deck, and finally a fire watcher cab on top. Town money will be proposed to build it and donated funds used to outfit the fire watcher cab. The budget line item will be put into a 2021 budget request. Although the original plan of retrofitting the original was accepted, the leader's rationale to re-think the strategy surrounded building a new structure rather than retrofit an existing one which may require more maintenance in the short term. Additionally, in the new proposal, an observation deck will add a new recreation attraction to the summit, which is consistent with the Recreation Department's long-term strategy. The Maine Chapter will continue to work with the York FD on this project. Currently, the tower steel still stands, but the rotted cab has been removed.

Ossipee Hill

This year FFLA members worked a rehab effort on the wooden superstructure. We replaced a few of the worst rotted and cracked structure bracing. An FFLA grant also helped fund some of this work. We will continue these efforts in 2020. The lookout is available for use using volunteers during high fire danger.

NREC Woods Explorers

This summer, the Maine Chapter and a past watchman worked with the Natural Resource Education Center out of Greenville on a Fire Tower segment of their Woods Explorers for kids program. We gave a tower presentation and talk in the watchman's camp and tower tour. We also went along on an interpretive hike up Mount Kineo. And finally, we toured the Maine Forest Service facility in Greenville.

Other Projects

On the volunteer front, **Mount Hope** remains in good shape and is manned by volunteers when they are available. **Mount Agamenticus** is closed due to the cab replacement effort and won't open in 2020. **Ossipee Hill** tower has had little activity in 2019 due to the lack of volunteers. There may be one or two available volunteers in 2020. The Maine Director authored a commemorative article placed in the North Maine Woods flyer for the 100th anniversary of the Deboullie Fire Lookout site.

Other Activities

Made several tower site visits this past year. Trips included #4 Mountain, Squaw Mountain, Williams Mountain, Nulhedus Mountain, Big Spencer Mountain, Boundary Bald Mountain, and Mount Kineo.

A small group of FFLA members bushwacked over **Nulhedus mountain** to the south west side and located the site of the watchman's camp. Although gone, the site revealed many artifacts.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Cobb
Maine Director