

# North Carolina Chapter Report 2009

The North Carolina chapter had another successful year in 2009. Success was had in membership, fundraising, awareness, access, and preservation.

The greatest success of the NC chapter involved the successful lobbying for funding to preserve USFS towers in western North Carolina. The USFS received \$734,000 in funding as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed by the Obama administration. These funds will be used to rehabilitate and restore lookout towers in North Carolina national forests. Towers planned for rehabilitation include the Wayah Bald, Albert Mountain, Joanna Bald, and Panther Top towers in the Nantahala National Forest and the Green Knob lookout in the Pisgah National Forest.

The 2009 Eastern Summer FFLA conference was hosted by the NC chapter and held during June in picturesque Asheville, NC. The conference was attended by about 30 people including several members from eastern chapters as well as representatives from the USFS. The conference was composed of a day of slideshow presentations and discussions involving southeastern lookout towers and fire tower preservation and a day of traveling beautiful western North Carolina to visit multiple lookout towers. FFLA member Lloyd Allen hosted a tour of the restored and re-erected Little Snowball tower at the Big Ivy Historical Campus in Dillingham, NC. FFLA member and tower operator Orval Banks gave a tour and demonstration at his Chambers Mountain lookout tower. The group also visited towers on Green Knob in the Pisgah National Forest and Mt. Mitchell at Mt. Mitchell State Park.

Over \$700 was fundraised for the restoration of the Shuckstack lookout tower. The preservation and restoration of this tower remains one of the chapter's primary goals, and fundraising for this project will become a central focus in 2010. An open dialogue regarding this project was established with the NPS for the first time and included the primary archaeologist and landscape architect from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. A group hike was organized to the tower to visit it in person, evaluate its condition, and discuss its future as well as opportunities for rehabilitation. At that time, the fire tower was dedicated into the NHLR on-site.

In addition to Shuckstack, several other western NC lookout towers were dedicated into the NHLR with presentations of plaque/certificates on-site by NC chapter member Wes Greene. These included the Little Snowball tower and rededications at the Duckett Top and Panther Top lookouts.

The Duckett Top lookout tower in Madison County received an emergency stabilization grant from the national FFLA fund which was put to use by chapter member Wes Greene to rehabilitate its exterior. Wes spent several weekends, including nights camped in the tower, repainting it in its entirety. Combined with the NCFS's replacement of the tower's roof, Duckett Top now looks fantastic.

The NC chapter continued to grow in size and has increased to 31 members in addition to 6 USFS/NPS memberships. It is the goal of the chapter to exceed 40 members by the end of 2010.

Chapter director Peter Barr continued to promote fire towers and their preservation in western North Carolina with his book, *Hiking North Carolina's Lookout Towers*. He performed several more slideshow presentations at various locations throughout the state as well as a speaking opportunity at *Appalachian Trail Days* in Damascus, VA.

The *Lookout Tower Challenge* (LTC), cosponsored by the FFLA and the Carolina Mountain Club, got off to an excellent start following its 2009 initiation. The program generated a significant interest in fire towers among hikers and was featured in several newspaper articles in the region. An astounding five people completed the challenge program in just its first year. Completers were recognized and rewarded certificates and an embroidered hiking patch in October at the CMC's annual dinner banquet.

The NC chapter continued its online presence by converting to an easily updateable blog format. Its new location at <http://nclookouts.blogspot.com> enables frequent news and stories involving NC lookout towers to be shared with members and interested parties in a quick fashion. Site visitation has increased dramatically with the new format.

NC chapter director Peter Barr received the 2009 Doug Newman Award, presented by FFLA chairman Keith Argow at the Eastern Summer Conference. Peter Barr also assumed the role and duties of FFLA Eastern Deputy Director in July 2008 for the remainder of 2009 and ran for reelection at the end of the year.

A dialogue was extended with USFS district rangers of the Nantahala and Tusquitee districts in the Nantahala National Forest to establish access dates for restricted lookouts at Albert Mountain, Cowee Bald, Joanna Bald, and Panther Top. Two access dates were facilitated by the USFS at the Panther Top tower in October (in coordination with peak fall foliage season) and were well attended. It is the goal of the NC chapter to continue these access dates at this tower and establish new dates at other towers in western North Carolina next fall.

Lookout towers as scenic outdoors destinations were featured in the cover article of *Blue Ridge Outdoors* magazine in October, a publication with a circulation in excess of 100,000 issues distributed throughout the southeast and mid-Atlantic. The article was composed following much lobbying from the NC chapter. Both NC chapter director Peter Barr and FFLA national chairman Keith Argow were interviewed for the article. The story featured an insert involving the preservation of the Shuckstack lookout tower.

The NC chapter continued to grow and increased membership by 40%. The chapter now has 31 paid members in addition to 6 comp memberships. It is the goal of the chapter to exceed 40 members by the end of 2010.

NC chapter director Peter Barr will be thru-hiking the 2,178-mile long Appalachian Trail in 2010 from March through August. During the trip, he intends to visit over 25 lookout towers in various states as well as meet many FFLA members. His goal and that of the chapter will be to fundraise \$2,178 for the restoration of the Shuckstack tower from the interest generated from his journey – one dollar for each mile hiked. The establishment of an information and dedicated giving site at <http://www.saveshuckstack.com> will also be a chapter goal in 2010.

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