



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
Annual Report for 2019**

New York State ended the year with 89 members (66 in 2017, 78 in 2018). Of those, 22 are plus members. These numbers put NYS in the top 5 chapters in the US in terms of membership. Southern California, Idaho North – Montana, Oregon, and Western Washington are the only chapters with more members. The numbers reflect 16 new members and 5 members who did not renew, increasing overall by 11.

Our Chapter had an Opening balance of \$571.13 and a closing balance of \$740.01. Our expenses were mostly related to hosting the Northeastern Conference, and several fire tower projects, including everything from painting projects to more extensive work projects like were done at Blue Mt and Pillsbury. We strive to provide not only voluntary manpower for the projects, but also to provide reasonable refreshments for all the hard working volunteers. In 2019 we were fortunate to have housing generously provided for those projects by FFLA Member Ron Hart and by Owner Jeff Vander Molen at Steamboat Landing in Blue Mountain Lake. We also worked with NYSDEC to purchase translation services so that fire tower brochures could be translated into French for the Lyon Mt Fire Tower which is the one closest to the Canadian border.

Fire activity around the state was minimal in 2019.

One tower was added, the Upper Esopus Fire Tower bringing the total standing towers in NYS to 73, though fire spotting is not a stated purpose for the tower. It was wonderful to see a fire tower being erected from start to finish; seeing the holes dug for the footings through to the crane putting the top on and everything in between. Though the techniques and equipment may be different than the first towers in the state, it was likely just as exhilarating to see the completed project.

I did 36 fire tower visits, some multiple times plus one lost lookout site. Visits were done for inspections, painting, restoration work, centennial events (Hurricane, Stillwater and Balsam Lake Fire Tower all celebrated same), and volunteering.

Major restoration projects occurred on Blue Mt* and Pillsbury Fire Towers. Pillsbury work will be completed in 2020.

I attended a number of community meetings and attended several meetings to discuss new fire tower projects that are under consideration.

In June we hosted the Northeastern Conference of the FFLA. We had just about 30 enthusiasts in attendance and cooperative weather! We enjoyed fabulous speakers, food, friends and visits to several fire towers.

There are currently 471 Members in our facebook group where we have lively discussions, great information sharing and many historical photos are shared. I am thinking we may give a One year membership to the FFLA to the 500th person to join!

Our monthly newsletter continues. It offers an opportunity for news, historical items, announcements, and communication. It is distributed electronically to about 200 persons and by postal mail to a dozen or so individuals.

I did presentations on fire towers at a local elementary school and at the local visitor center this year. It is imperative that we continue to find ways to involve young persons not only in our organization, but also in fire towers and their history in general. I was impressed with how well received these programs were and will strive to do more in 2020.

*In 2019 we partnered with Team Rubicon once again who generously provided of their time to work at Blue Mountain Fire Tower. We also partnered with Historicorp to see if we could save the Vandewhacker Observer's cabin.

In 2019 we were excited to see that the Makomis Fire Tower was unearthed. The 1916 Aeromotor LL25 model tower was found to be in great condition and returned to wonderful condition. It now awaits an appropriate home which we hope will be in NYS.

In September we encouraged a Statewide Lighting Event, an opportunity to have a volunteer in a fire tower cab shining a light for a half hour while members of the local community would look up, wonder at the strange light and be reminded of the important role the fire tower once held in protecting the community. In 2019 we had 20 fire towers participate! Some of the towers had retired rangers and current rangers lighting the lights together. Some fire towers were able to connect with local establishments for the lighting including desserts and drinks. Some were able to recreate history by flashing their lights at each other. A significant part of this process was informing the community about the process ahead of time. We need to improve this process for 2020 and are considering ways to get consistent messages and press releases to all.

We received several donations in 2019 both monetary ones and one that were treasures of historical items that were donated. We greatly appreciate those contributions to our chapter.

In 2020 we hope to make some improvements to our Lighting Event, include some additions to our monthly newsletters and we promise, get the chapter web page up and running! We plan to purchase some new tools that we find we use often, such as clamps and another extendable paint pole. We will continue our work with fire tower groups and the NYSDEC to restore and maintain fire towers under our VSA agreements. I really need to devote some time to updating our NYS Lost Lookouts and to be sure we have all of the eligible towers listed on the NHLR. I also must do some recruitment to obtain new members and to retain current members. We could always use more people to assist us in our work.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Rankin, Director
New York State Chapter
Forest Fire Lookout Association