

Massachusetts Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association

2022 Annual Report

Southern New England Director Jack Kelley

New Director!

In September, we officially acquired a director after six years of vacancy: Jack Kelley, who has extensively researched and visited towers in Massachusetts and across the northeast since joining the FFLA in 2016.

U.S. Forest Service Visits MA Towers

In August, a documentary team from the U.S. Forest Service spent some time in Districts 1, 2, and 9 of the MA DCR Bureau of Forest Fire Control visiting towers and conducting interviews with state and municipal fire personnel. Accompanied by the MA FFLA director and FFLA member Josh Nigro, who is also the District 1 Fire Warden, the group also met with DCR Chief Warden Dave Celino to discuss the need for lookouts. While the exact details of this documentary have to remain vague for the time being, it was a very exciting few days, and will give great publicity for Massachusetts towers.

Drought Conditions

A lack of rainfall left the majority of the state in conditions of moderate to extreme drought for much of the summer fire season, culminating in a ban on all outdoor fires on DCR property, and in late August, a 100-acre fire at the Lynn Woods Reservation. Lynn Woods is home to two fire towers (On Mount Gilead and Burrill Hill respectively), both of which survived undamaged.

While this may not seem like a lot of news, it's been a quiet few years for the Massachusetts chapter, so anything feels exciting. Here's to a great 2023!

Rhode Island Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association

2022 Annual Report

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Shannock Hill Goes Up in Smoke

On July 6, 2022, three teens launched fireworks at the abandoned Shannock Hill fire tower in Richmond, reportedly as part of an attempt to see if they could actually set it on fire. It turned out that yes, unfortunately, they could, and the cab of the tower was gutted by flames despite the best efforts of local firemen. Built in 1968, while not used for fire detection since the early 2000s, the cab contained radio equipment for municipal and state emergency networks. The RI Department of Environmental Management is now considering complete removal of the structure and replacement with a new communications tower, though discussions are ongoing. The teens that started the fire were facing first-degree arson charges as of July 8.

Restorations, restorations, restorations!

2022 saw the emergence of a small, but dedicated, group of HAM radio operators and former or current emergency personnel start what has become an incredibly successful effort to restore many of the state's remaining fire towers for both housing radio equipment and as potential interpretive sites. Since late spring, the group has amassed tens of thousands of dollars in funds and completed amazing work such as reroofing the tower on Chopmist Hill in Scituate, reconnecting power to Pine Hill in Exeter, and clearing trees around the Mowry tower, on Woonsocket Hill in North Smithfield. They are passionate, energized, and actively making great progress--and are looking for volunteers, so reach out!