



FOREST FIRE LOOKOUT ASSOCIATION
Monterey Chapter
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ANNUAL REPORT 2024

The Monterey Chapter operated the historic Chews Ridge Lookout (NHLR 751) for the 6th consecutive season for the Los Padres National Forest (LPNF), under the USFS Agreement Number 20-VS-11050751-0001. The Lookout was in service from Wednesday May 22nd through Sunday Nov. 24th. We welcomed and trained 6 new volunteers this season. We had over 240 visitors to the lookout, including many from both local and distant fire agencies. We are most grateful to the Monterey Ranger District for arranging for the early season servicing of the CRLO pit toilet (5/24/2023).

For the 2024 Fiscal Year (October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024), 55 Chews Ridge Lookouts volunteered 3158 Hours (or 1.75 Person Years) with an appraised value of \$100,424.

Chews Ridge Smoke and Lightning Reports

Thankfully, it was a quiet fire season for the Monterey Ranger District of the Los Padres National Forest. Seven fires were spotted off the forest; several of these fires were called in to dispatch who advised us that these had already been reported. No lightning storms were observed during 2024. The #CoastFire (June 17), in the vicinity of Botcher's Gap, was called in to Dispatch at 1336 hours. The smoke from this fire was faintly visible from the Chews Ridge Lookout, between Puerto Suello and Bixby Mountain.

USFS Strategic Fuel Break along Chews Ridge

The mastication and clean-up work along Chews Ridge was completed in early spring. The vegetation is quickly regrowing, and the wildflowers and milkweed have returned. One of our lookouts watched a Monarch Butterfly change from a caterpillar to a chrysalis in less than two hours (see photo below).



Reconnect and New Recruit Training: March 25, 2023

We had a good turnout for our in-person Picnic Lunch, and New Recruit and Reconnect Training at the Marina Public Library. Six new volunteer lookouts completed their in-person, online and tower training. One of our new lookouts, Arlo Perlstein (#54), was a FFLA Calendar (2025) Winner.

Ham Radio Field Day: June 21-23, 2024

The “Chews Ridge Gang” amateur radio operators gathered again for their 60th annual camping and volunteer weekend on Chews Ridge, which coincides with the national field day radio exercise. Thank you to Matthew Todd (#8), David Hitch (#55), Carolyn Hart (#35), Krissy Huston (#41) and Heather Henrick (#30) for helping coordinate gates and access. They appreciate our ongoing support of their volunteer work.

USFS Public Affairs Visit: August 28, 2024

Robin Dickson (#23) fielded a planned visit by Yassy Wilkins and Veronica Verdin, two USFS public affairs employees based in the LA area, and accompanied by Ivor de Manty (Battalion 11, Monterey Ranger District, LPNF). They were visiting Central and Southern California Forests to prepare various media presentations covering the Wildfire Crisis Strategy and the Monterey Strategic Fuel Break. They interviewed Robin, covering various topics including the motivation for volunteering, training requirements and a typical day in the life of a lookout. Chews Ridge Lookout was the first lookout tower they visited on a tour through four National Forests.

Big Sur Multi-Agency Facility Student Volunteer Visit: November 9, 2024

Lookouts Heather Henrick (#30) and Steve Benoit (#5) hosted a visit by Camey Scott (Los Padres NF, Big Sur Multi-Agency Facility) with a group of student volunteers from the King City High School. Heather and Steve explained how our lookouts detect, locate and report forest fires.

Ventana Wildlife Society California Condor Tracking: December 30, 2024

Richard Ruh (#44) teamed up with a biologist from the Ventana Wildlife Society (<https://www.ventanaws.org>) to radio track the endangered California Condors. Chews Ridge has a good view of the Pinnacles, Peach Tree Valley and the Santa Lucia range. The VWS biologist was looking for several missing condors. While they detected 24 signals, out of a little over 100 condors between Pinnacles and Big Sur, the signals from missing birds were not detected. The missing condors were eventually tracked to the Cone Peak area, where they were unfortunately found deceased.

Monterey Chapter of the FFLA Fundraising

We received several generous private donations from Chews Ridge Lookouts. We are planning several fundraising activities to help support tower maintenance and repairs.

Chews Ridge Lookout Tower Winter Storm Damage

The Chews Ridge Lookout has already suffered significant damage from the early season high winds and rain.



Winter Security Check Dec 30, 2024



Tree removed
Limbs overhang
road



Connecting straps
bent out by wind

Chews Ridge Lookouts Support the Bald Mtn Lookout Project (Invo National Forest)

The FFLA and the Inyo National Forest are partnering to bring Bald Mountain Lookout back into service staffed by volunteers. The BMLO is located 11 miles east of Hwy 395 and near June Lakes. CRLO lookouts Ron Ross (#33) and Mary Hubbel (#16) scouted the location in advance to report back to Steve Prather (#19), Jon Ramsey (#54) and Nancy Baker (#1), who each staffed the BMLO lookout for multiple days. Panoramas are currently being constructed by Nancy Baker, Richard Ruh and Karen Boyko (S. California Mountain Foundation).

Respectfully submitted by,

Nancy L. Baker

Nancy Baker, Chair, Monterey Chapter of the FFLA

Lois Van Buren

Lois Van Buren, Assistant Chair Monterey Chapter of the FFLA