

Friends of Three Fingers Lookout 2024 Report

Three Fingers Lookout has continued to see increasing interest as a backpacking destination, especially since it has received quite a bit of attention from videos posted on social media. At more or less a 40 mile round-trip hike, depending on which route one takes, and complicated rock and ice crossings, it is quite difficult to get to. Based on log book entries, there were approximately 300 people who visited the lookout in 2024, roughly 20% more than the estimated 250 who visited in 2023. The Friends of Three Fingers Lookout group has 15-20 regularly involved volunteers dedicated to keeping access to the Three Fingers Lookout open, preserving and maintaining the lookout itself, and communicating about the history and needs of this special place. We recorded 943 hours of work done in 2024, though with the knowledge of additional unrecorded help, well over 1000 hours were spent.

Financially, since its inception four years ago, Friends of Three Fingers Lookout has been able to fund the costs of repairs and maintenance to the lookout via private donations and an annual grant from the Rotary Club of Everett Port Gardner. Our beginning balance this year was \$4315. We received \$807 in private donations and a \$500 grant from the Rotary, expended \$2357 and will end the year with a balance of \$3269. We are also grateful for the collaboration of the USFS Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie unit, which purchased much needed new siding for the lookout earlier this year that has been prepped and is awaiting transport to the lookout next year.

Between 2000 - 2023, the FOTFL built and installed a new trailhead sign on FS 41 across the river from the washed out bridge, inventoried the contents of the lookout, primed and painted the interior, and made many repairs to broken windows and shutter parts. Wood for 2 new shutters and a new door was carried up, and the shutters assembled and installed on the south side of the building.

Following is some of the work we accomplished this year, in 2024.

One of the major issues addressed was the problem of human waste accumulating on the summit block around the lookout. A grant proposal was written and a \$500 grant given by the Rotary Club of Everett to help deal with this issue. We designed, built, and installed a new trailhead sign for the Meadow Mountain trail that matches other FS trailhead signs in appearance and created several wag-bag dispenser boxes using mostly recycled weather-proof materials we already had. Laminated placards with information about the trail and the need to carry out human waste were posted to all three trailhead signs. A plastic bin filled with wag bags and placards were also carried up to the Lookout itself. Rotary and other donated funds were used to order 300 wag bags and the dispenser boxes were restocked throughout the summer. Additionally, a urinal was designed and built out of almost all natural materials behind the lookout on the summit block that will safely and effectively direct liquid waste away from the building. A report was given to the Rotary Club of how their funds were used and they sponsored an additional \$500 to be used for the 2025 year's need of wag bags. In total, \$1167 was expended this year to develop and support this program. We believe

that this effort was highly effective and are committed to continue funding it in the coming year. We hope to get more donations to cover the ongoing expense of replenishing the wag bags.

Another big issue is keeping the lookout accessible to travelers. FS road 41 is currently closed about 5 miles before the bridge over Canyon Creek due to washouts. The culverts under the closed portions of FS road 41 were regularly cleared to prevent further washouts, and any downed trees and branches across the road were removed. The illegal bridge extension over Canyon Creek made of railroad tracks was NOT done or approved by anyone in our group. We did do some exploring and scouting of nearby roads and trails to see if there would be any better way to access the Three Fingers trails in the future. We hope that foot and bike access can continue to be made to the lookout trail complex especially in light of the expected removal of the existing damaged Canyon Creek bridge. Also, with the help of extra volunteers from the Everett Mountaineers and other groups, overgrown bushes and downed trees along both the Meadow Mountain and Tupso Pass trails were cut back and logged out using non-powered hand-tools only, in compliance with Wilderness Act rules.

The lookout itself was inspected and a detailed inventory of materials already there and items needed for repairs was made. Many, many pounds of supplies were organized, staged, and transported to the lookout on volunteers' backs, and many more pounds of garbage were hauled out. In previous recent summers, FOTFL volunteers had primed and painted the inside of the lookout. Lumber similar in type and quality to the wood already up there was purchased and pieces of appropriate length were cut, prepped, and painted. Some pieces were carried up the trail and installed in place of damaged siding on the lookout. Existing good siding was sanded and painted with paint matching the original used. A new door was assembled on site with historically accurate hardware and new threshold were fitted. The doorknob and locking mechanism were repaired. Broken shutters, windows, and window locks were repaired and/or had parts replaced. We put effort into maintaining the lookout according to the National Historic Lookout register and Forest Service archeologists' suggestions, keeping to a reflection of its original historic condition. Finally, two new beautiful sitting stools were designed, built, and brought up to replace a small broken bench.

Our group also worked on communicating about the lookout with many parties. Old lookout registers were organized, scanned, and uploaded to a shareable document. There are currently 987 members of the Friends of Three Fingers Facebook group with posts and comments made nearly daily during the busy summer months. Posts were also made to other Facebook groups, Washington Trails Association, and Alltrails about trail conditions, lookout closures, and the human waste problem. Presentations were made to several community groups, including the Darrington Ranger district.

Next year's needs include some very heavy replacements of floor support beams, more siding, and new ladders. FOTFL may need to utilize a potentially expensive transportation service to deliver those materials closer to the summit as they are too

big and unwieldy to be hand-carried up so many miles. This will, of course, require approval and permission by the Forest Service and possibly funding that currently surpasses the group's financial resources. We intend to explore options for non-profit opportunities or a targeted fund raising effort with group members.

Keeping the trails and roads that access Three Fingers Lookout navigable, maintaining the lookout itself, decreasing human waste around it, and apprising people about what's happening has taken a lot of labor. The FOTFL members are glad to have been able to work together with many other parties to accomplish these goals in 2024. We hope that this precious historical building and beautiful destination remain there for people to enjoy for many years to come.