



2024 Indiana Chapter Annual Report Forest Fire Lookout Association

MEMBERSHIP: The Indiana Chapter has 6 current members from Indiana. I also oversee 5 people from Illinois. I just learned FFLA added Missouri which brought in 3 members to our team. The Indiana Chapter Chair has a long interest in Indiana lookout towers so was happy to absorb these three members. The balance for the three states is \$217.

CURRENT CHAPTER OFFICER: Teena Ligman, Director

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES:

I still have not completed my quest to climb every tower in Indiana. Mostly because I only climb one if I happen to be in the area. But I have been talking to another young man who has the same goal and is making admirable progress.

INSPIRING YOUNG MAN CLIMBING INDIANA TOWERS

This young man who is planning to climb all of Indiana's available towers- His story is interesting because he has no legs. I plan to have him write a story for the Lookout Magazine when he finishes his mission but here's what he's told me about himself- I'll get the story to Gary for the magazine soon.

My name is Dustin Pruett and I am 24 years old. I was born with Femur Fibula Ulna Syndrome and Fibular Hemimelia. On one leg I had an extreme clubfoot, my other leg I had severe bone deformities, and my hand was webbed like a duck's foot. I underwent numerous surgeries and ultimately became a single leg below knee amputee soon after I was born. My foot and hand were corrected. In 2018, my club foot was no longer supporting me, and the decision was made to have another amputation at 18 years old.

Despite all of this I have played numerous different sports while in school, with wrestling being my primary sport. I hunt, fish, and do pretty much anything outdoors. I have started my mission to climb wildfire lookout towers to inspire people to tackle their dreams. Stairs usually are an amputee's nightmare, which is why I chose the towers to climb. If I can do it, anyone can do it with some work and assistance! I do a lot of hiking at different parks with the same mission in mind. My goal is to climb as many towers as I can climb all over the United States, and maybe beyond if the opportunity arises! So far, I have only climbed Indiana towers, and I am always looking for new towers to climb, and obstacles to navigate. I recently received an electric assist off road trike I plan to take to all the different places I go, and maybe some easy trails! Not only that, I just received an amputee archery grant through the A3G Initiative that provided me with a new hunting bow that I also am anticipating using at different archery ranges! The towers started it all, and it is growing to more and more things as I go. The outdoors is my home when I can, and I've always been told the things I do can inspire others. I finally realized this and wanted to share my experiences to help others while I have fun!

Thank you for what you do in keeping the history alive! Dustin Pruett

A SECOND AMAZING MAN WHO CARES ABOUT TOWERS

I got an email on January 22 of 2024 from another man and I knew it would be a good year for Indiana Lookouts. Here is what he wrote:

“My name is Mark Armantrout, I’ve just today submitted my membership payment for the first time at the FFLA website, and thought I’d introduce myself. I’m a big fan of Indiana firetowers!

I have done a lot of research into Indiana tower sites, both the standing towers and the old sites. Over the past few years, my brother and I have visited almost all the standing ones and visited a few of the old tower sites on foot like Dutch Ridge and Versailles. In particular, I’ve spent a lot of time looking at old topographic maps online.

Last year we tried to visit Lilly, but it’s not really accessible, but we were able to locate it through binoculars from about two miles away.

I have put together a big document with all my research of 38 or 39 tower sites in Indiana. It’s a big PDF file of about 13 MB. I still have a few “mysteries” – like a 4th tower inside Crane? – and I’d appreciate any feedback you have....”

By the end of 2024, he has put together an incredible new website just of his work with Indiana Lookouts- it’s amazing! He has collected more information than I ever found, has read every old edition of Outdoor Indiana and talked to county historians and just dedicated much of the last year to Indiana lookout towers. You can view his work here:

<https://www.indianafiretowers.com/>

He has done GREAT work. I’ve learned a lot from the things he’s unearthed. I still need to go through everything he’s documented and put on this website because I’m sure he has a lot of information I’m not aware of. I’m proud of Mark’s work.

INQUIRY ABOUT BUYING A TOWER

Last summer a landowner in Lawrence County who owns the 2nd highest point in the county (and this county has a lot of high points!) asked a DNR Forester how he could buy a lookout tower. She referred him to me, and I sent him some information on FFLA and encouraged him – saying it would be great to have another tower in the area. I sent him a couple towers for sale on the FFLA site and one from the last magazine and Gary Weber forwarded a couple more that had just come on the market. He told the DNR Forester we’d been very helpful, and he was checking into it.

When I just checked with him again, he said he’s still interested in getting a tower. He is waiting on a response from Duke Energy on the minimum structure distance he’d need to put the tower from their main transmission line that runs across his property. He also had concerns on how to secure a tower from trespass. He asked me to continue to send him information on towers that come up for sale.

CASCADES/GOOSEPOND TWR UPDATE

Last year's report included a story about Missouri's Cascades Tower being moved to Indiana by the owner of Luva's Campground adjacent to the Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area. Bob Frakes wrote an article for the Lookout Magazine about this when I told him the story. There was a problem getting the cab section on top and as of this fall... the cab was still not mounted on top the tower. ☹️



I checked with Jason, the tower owner, who said the tower installer has assured him it would be up before April. Jason said they'd found the problem they think and fixed it. The concrete footers with anchors were poured square but not level. They've now adjusted the feet to the exact same grade, which they believe is what was causing the problems at the top with bolting the cab to the tower. I offered to buy him a membership to FFLA, but he said he'd sign up himself if I sent him a link. He noted even though the tower is missing the top few sections, people still stop and take pictures of it.

PROGRAMS GIVEN

I gave a program in April as part of the Bedford Parks Program series on Indiana Lookout Towers and had quite a good turnout (maybe 30 people). In fact, some of the people who came were from Bloomington, IN and they said it would be a good program for the Monroe County History Center. The next day I got a call from their director, and I'm scheduled now to speak to the Monroe County History group in May 2025 about Indiana lookout towers.

I also received a call this fall from Ginger Murphy, the Assistant Director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Apparently IDNR has a new Podcast series and Ginger knew I was familiar with lookout towers and thought that would make a good podcast. So, I met with Allison Martin in December, who does the weekly podcasts, and we spent a fun morning talking about lookout towers. She said she'd take an hour or more of us talking about towers and put together a podcast and post it on the DNR site. It has not been posted yet.

OLD FOREST SERVICE TOWER RESURRECTED IN NEW PLACE

When I was asked to do the podcast, I got out my folder on Lookout Towers and went over information I wanted to be sure I talked about. I ran across a note from Ryan Yoder, that I'd gotten back in 2017, while still working for the Forest Service. Ryan said his family had purchased the Spears Tower many years before and wondered if I had plans for an Aeromotor MC-39 lookout tower. They needed the schematics so they could maybe put it back up again. I had a CD of Lookout Tower plans that Smoke Pfeiffer had sent me in 2009, so I copied the CD and sent it to him and asked that he let me know if he got the tower back up. I never heard anything back and had forgotten about it. Until now.



The Spears Tower shown in 1973, used as a communication tower.

I was going through Jasper, IN where Mr. Yoder's signature block said his business was, so I stopped in. The business was still there and the woman at the desk said she was Ryan's sister. He wasn't in but I asked about a lookout tower he had inquired about. She was very excited to tell me about it and said oh yes, they'd gotten it up and it was beautiful; I should call him- she gave me the number.

Ryan too wanted to tell me about it. He said their family business had always been communications- including communication towers. They had repeaters and other devices on various towers including at one time lookout towers. His father had been very fond of the lookout towers so when the Forest Service started selling them and taking them down his dad wanted to save one. He said they'd purchased the tower from Dubois County REMC who may have bought several of the towers? They had managed the communication devices on the Spears Tower in Crawford County so bought it. He didn't know when that was, but the tower still had the repeaters on it for awhile and his family leased about an acre under a Special Use Permit from the Forest Service to keep the tower there until

about 1987 when the Forest Service wanted to put up a new taller communication tower. They were told they'd have to remove the old lookout.

He said it was quite the undertaking. They hired two crews; one was Graber Construction. The lookout tower was on a steep hill, and it was a challenge for the big equipment to even get up the hill. But they got the tower down and the Yoder family stored it for 20 years.

Someone was telling Ryan about Cool Springs and what a beautiful place it was. The property is owned by OFS Brands, a hardwood furniture company. Ryan thought that might be just the place for the Spears Tower. He put a packet together with a CD of pictures of the old tower standing, a video of them taking it down, and gave it to some foresters to give to Hank Menke, owner of OFS. Nothing happened. Years went by and Ryan was talking to a neighbor who happened to be the attorney for Hank Menke. Ryan pitched his idea for a home for his tower to the attorney. The attorney said he'd be on a plane ride with Hank later that week and if Ryan gave him a packet, he'd talk to



New site of Spears Tower at the OFS Cool Springs Complex. Zipline tower behind.

Hank about it. Immediately Ryan gets a call and Hank wanted to talk to him. They were interested. Send them the plans. So he sent them what I'd sent him and the OFS guys went to work. They got all the pieces and had them sand-blasted and then sent the whole structure to Louisville and had everything re-galvanized and a "patina" put on it so it looked older. They determined after all those years in storage there was only one piece missing and they had to add 1 foot angle iron to each leg. When they'd taken it down, they'd sawed off each of the legs to get them off the footers, but they were able to splice new extensions on the ends.

They had to build a bridge to get the tower components through the property to the hill they wanted to put it on; but Hank Menke didn't hesitate. He wanted the tower to be put back up. Ryan said his whole family got to be there to watch their tower go back up. Sadly, his father had died on Christmas Day 10 years before, so he didn't get to see the Spears Tower resurrected, but Hank said they could put a sign up that it was done in his memory. Ryan said an interesting side story - when the big crane pulled up from Graber Construction to start lifting the components of the tower it was the same operator who had been there when it was taken down! The man said he had been assigned to another job that day and only pulled at the last minute to come to this job. He was so proud to be a part of seeing the Spears Tower put back up again.

Ryan said the tower is beautiful. It has all new sheet metal, teak flooring and ceiling in the cab and the staircase and landing is beautiful wood. They added LED lights to the tower so it lights up at night – you can really only see it within the Cool Springs Property, but it is beautiful for events held there.

Cool Springs is a gated property, they have a lot of company and private events there and there are many things families can do – including climb the lookout tower and they built an adjacent tower with a zipline.

Hank wants to put up an interpretive sign about the tower – dedicating it to Ryan's dad and have the history of the tower. Ryan's mother has been working on that. She went to the Crawford County History Center and the woman there said she grew up in the house next to the old tower, so they've enjoyed working together on the history. It was likely built in 1936, named after John Spears and not used as an active tower after 1965. It now has a new lease on life at the Cool Springs Property.



Tower with LED Lights on legs to light tower at night.

TWO OTHER TOWERS ADDED TO INVENTORY

I had not been able to find the Salem Tower, but Mark Armantrout found it. He reported it is on private property, and he couldn't get very close but it's standing (shown to right). I had been ready to remove it from the inventory. Mark learned too that this was originally the Borden Tower that was relocated to this location.



Then I got a request from Mark Haughwout with a website question asking about a wooden lookout tower in a state park they had visited and asked where it was. The only one I could think they might be thinking of was in Brown County State Park. I had not really thought of it as a Lookout Tower since only a couple miles away, also in the State Park, is the 90' Weed Patch Tower. But looking at a vintage post card and how it is built, maybe it really was a secondary lookout? It likely had a different vantage point than Weed Patch. The sign at the bottom of the hill calls it the West Lookout Tower.



INTERESTING NOTE FOUND BY GARY WEBER

Gary Weber sent me a reference he found on an NGS sheet – he sent it to me, and I found it added to other information I'd found. I've long suspected some of Indiana's current towers were preceded by wooden towers and there are maps that have notes "Lookout Tower Point" with no sign of footers so I thought they may have once had a wooden tower or a tree tower. This seemed to have been an early predecessor of the current Henryville Tower which was built in 1928. The note from 1931 read "On the fifth knoll to the Northeast from the one on which the fire tower is located. An old Lookout tower of Hardwood, 25 feet in height, stands over the station." I had heard there was one tower built prior to 1930 in Clark State Forest and had a sign posted on it saying: "Stay Off, Unsafe to Climb". This is probably that tower.

FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES: No financial or fundraising activities in 2024.

OBJECTIVES FOR 2025:

My objectives are carried over from previous years

- I still hope to do some interviews of former towermen, their widows or old firefighters- though as the years go by, I'm losing those opportunities and have lost track of some of the possibilities I earlier knew of. If I get a good story, I'll write a story for the magazine.
- I want to continue to get around to all the towers. If any are not on the register, I need to get them on it!
- Work with the State Parks and Forests in Indiana on needed work on their towers as I visit them.
- Offer to give programs on lookout towers as I can.
- Generate more interest and members for FFLA.
- I need to also expand my travels to include Illinois and Missouri towers as I can.
- Reach out to the new members from Missouri to let them know they're associated with my Chapter now and that I'll be happy to work with them if they have questions.

2024 Indiana Tower Statistics:

1. Total lookout towers in chapter:	20 A few in bad shape.
1. Lilly	2. Winamac
3. Weed Patch	4. Lincoln City
5. West Lookout /Brown Co SP	6. Salem
7. Henryville	8. Ouabache
9. Ferdinand	10. Hickory Ridge
11. Cincinnati	12. Crane Tower
13. Wyandotte	14. Cascades/GoosePond
15. Skyline	16. Spears
17. Willow Valley	18. Hartwell
19. Mason Ridge	20. McCormicks Creek

2. Lookout Towers on National Register	9
3. Towers in active service:	0
4. Towers in rental program	0
5. Towers needing significant repairs	Unsure
6. Towers hopelessly dilapidated	2 – possibly more
7. Towers converted to alternate function	Many are used for radio/repeaters/antennas
8. Towers schedule to be removed	None known
9. Complete new tower under construction	0

2021 Illinois Tower Statistics -Not updated this year.

10. Total lookout towers in chapter:	3?
11. Lookout Towers on National Register	3
12. Towers in active service:	0
13. Towers in rental program	0
14. Towers needing significant repairs	Unsure
15. Towers hopelessly dilapidated	Unsure
16. Towers converted to alternate function	
17. Towers schedule to be removed	None known
18. Complete new tower under construction	0

Missouri Tower Statistics -Not updated this year.

19. Total lookout towers in chapter:

Google says there are 65 standing of the 260 towers they once had. I don't know if that's accurate but will try to find out.

20. Lookout Towers on National Register	10
21. Towers in active service:	0
22. Towers in rental program	0
23. Towers needing significant repairs	Unsure
24. Towers hopelessly dilapidated	Unsure
25. Towers converted to alternate function	
26. Towers schedule to be removed	I think yes, will try to find out
27. Complete new tower under construction	0

Respectfully submitted:

Teena Ligman, Indiana Chapter Chair

11 January 2025