



Forest Fire Lookout Association
2025 Eastern Conference
by Laurie Rankin

Wrapping up the 2025 Eastern Conference of the FFLA, June 20-22

At 7:30 AM, Karen, Paula, and Tom were all ready to assist in getting things set up and organized in Richmondville. Many thanks! At 8:00 AM, they began to arrive; from New York State, California, Idaho, Connecticut, Indiana, New Jersey, Massachusetts, North Carolina and New Mexico.

And so it began, it was a fast start too! By 9 AM, old friends had enjoyed some breakfast and catching up with one another. Next up were the introductions and new friends began to be made. Displays were arranged around the fire hall for attendees to see fire tower related items from books to legos to historical register books and more! By 10, lunches were packed and we were headed south to the Bramley Mountain Fire Tower. There, 18 of us hiked to the summit to meet Ann and Tom from the Friends of Bramley Mountain group. The weather was perfect, the trail was dry, and the views were remarkable! We enjoyed seeing the tower, the views, and our lunches, then moved back down the trail to our cars and headed off to our next tower visit, Berry Hill over in Chenango County. While this tower is certainly not new, the tower has been restored and reopened to the public in the recent past, providing an opportunity for many to climb it for the first time. The location also provides a restored Observer's cabin where FFLA Steward Ed was able to show off all the site has to offer. We could not stay long as we needed to get back to the Fire Hall in Richmondville to enjoy our Brooks BBQ Chicken Dinners! Some social time closed out the evening and all retired to rest up for day two.



Day two started even earlier with a delicious breakfast and hot coffee before our guest speakers arrived. We started the day with Paula from Team Rubicon who explained all that this remarkable group has to offer communities. Not only do they provide disaster response, but they also provide fire prevention mitigation and community projects such as restoring fire towers!

Next up was Ann Roberti, President of the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower who showed the video in the 'Around the State' listing below. Ann also explained some of the things she learned along the way, including how to overcome several challenges.

Next was Jeannette Barrett, Mayor of Speculator and the driving force behind the Makomis at Speculator project. Jeannette also provided us with an opportunity to view the PBS piece on the tower

restoration (<https://www.villageofspeculator.com/> and scroll down) and the challenges she and the Village faced and overcame to complete this project.

Member Ed Engelman put together an excellent presentation on the use of gin poles. He made a model one to illustrate how they were made and how they were utilized in the building of fire towers. Ed provided historical slides that showed some of the common uses for the gin poles, some of which might surprise you!

Dr. Andrew Vander Yacht from SUNY ESF spoke on combating Asbestos Forests and Good Fires.

NYS Forest Ranger JJ Rusher gave us an in depth look into the Fall 2024 wildfire season in New York.

Once all of the speakers were wrapped up, it was off to visit Kane Mt. Fire Tower and our Volunteer FFLA Steward Jim. It was a busy place and Jim was managing the entire day very well! Then we were off to Makomis at Speculator to see the work done in re-erecting that tower. Following that visit it was back to base for dinner which was admittedly more than a bit late. We announced the silent auction bid winners and thank all of those who donated items for the auction! Thanks to all who attended, spoke, stewarded, tabled, and assisted all weekend and to the Richmondville Fire Dept for providing us with a great space for the conference. Whew - I am tired just writing about this! But that wraps it up!

But wait, we were not quite done! On Sunday, former NYS Director Fred Knauf put together a trip to some private fire towers, but the weather did not cooperate and washed out some roads before they could visit. The first stop ended up being the Randall Fire tower (on private property, the former Swancutt Hill tower) the tallest fire tower in NYS at 99'9". Following that, 2 more stops were made to 2 former fire tower sites; Morgan Hill and Georgetown. Thanks Fred! Now that is a wrap!

