

Report from FFLA Washington Chapter- January 2026

2025 was a really good year for FFLA-WA Chapter.

- We have had very good luck adding members to FFLA—we are up about 20% over last year.
- A major rebuild continues on High Rock, with the Sand Mountain Society working with the White Pass Country Historical Society to remove the lookout, rebuild critical parts, and then put the refurbished back in place to watch over Mt. Rainier and the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The lookout pieces were helicoptered up to High Rock this summer and reassembled. While there is work still to do, the expectation is that the refurbishment will be complete by August 2026. White Pass Country Historical Society met with FFLA about how to create a volunteer lookout program similar to one used by other volunteer groups.
- Major maintenance was done on Three Fingers, including replacing rotten floor joists, repairing shutters, and some serious painting. The volunteers also are taking actions to deal with the problem of waste disposal by putting up “WAG bag” dispensers and encouraging people to haul their waste out.
- Modifications to Suntop to make it accessible to persons with disabilities were completed this year and the lookout hosted it’s first disabled visitors including visitors in wheelchairs.
- Maintenance work took place on Hidden Lake and North Mountain lookouts.

- Our operational lookouts were active and noticed this summer:
 - o Goat Peak (Methow Ranger District) was staffed all summer by volunteer Chris Estrada. Chris did a bang up job, providing first reports on at least 7 smokes and providing valuable radio reports, fire following, and of course, greeting a bunch of visitors.
 - o Suntop was staffed by volunteers for 106 days, provided two first reports, and hosted just under 5,000 visitors
 - o Kelly Butte was staffed by volunteers for 90 days, provided two first reports, and hosted 1,800 visitors. Of note, Kelly Butte and some of our volunteers were featured in an article by the Seattle Times focused on today’s fire lookouts (along with another article about Desolation Peak).

- We brought back 2 fire lookouts into operational service
 - o Mt Bonaparte (Tonasket Ranger District), which had been a paid staffed lookout until last year was about to be abandoned by the Forest Service due to staff shortages and repairs that needed to take place. We used relationships with the Colville NF to propose to repair and staff the lookout with volunteers. After a number of meetings, Tonasket District Ranger agreed, signed a Volunteer Service Agreement and we proceeded on repairs. We managed to finish repairs and gain permission to go

- operational on August 1st and staffed the lookout until Sept 28th. While on duty, volunteers made a number of repairs and restorations to Bonaparte as well as the historic 1914 lookout cabin. And they provided one and possibly two first reports. At the end of the season we met with the District Ranger who expressed great pleasure at our efforts and approved a plan to go operational again in 2026
- o Red Top lookout (Cle Elum Ranger District) was volunteer staffed until 2020, then has sat empty due to a report of deficiencies. We approached the District Ranger with a proposal to make repairs and re-staff the lookout starting in July and he readily agreed, signing a Group Volunteer Service Agreement (VSA) with us as the Washington Chapter. We made needed repairs to the lookout in June, including totally restoring the lightning protection system (copper wiring that had been stolen had to be replaced) and some structural repairs. On July 26th we went operational and stayed in service (with a few gaps) until Sept 23rd. During that period we spotted and made first reports on 3 major fires and greeted 536 visitors. The Cle Elum District Ranger was hugely pleased with our efforts and also approved operations in 2026. And the Friends of Red Top is forming as an official Sub-chapter!

2026 is promising as well, although not as promising as we were hoping

- We have been in discussions with the Darrington Ranger District about continuing refurbishment and putting back into operation Green Mountain and Miners Ridge Lookouts. Sadly, the big storm of late December cut off access to these lookout (Green Mountain is now a 23 mile one way hike, while Miners Ridge is now 34 miles in), so Forest Service has asked us to put these on the back burner for a while.
- We have been discussing with Colville National Forest about potentially repairing and re-opening South Baldy lookout and we are hopeful to move forward on that project this year.
- Weyerhaeuser has reached out to us about locating a fire lookout at the Mount St. Helens Forest Learning Center near Toutle WA and we are exploring with them the prospect of relocating Tunk Mountain lookout to that site.
- A group of volunteers is working hard on relocating Franson Peak lookout to the Republic Ranger District Offices.
- We will be doing major maintenance and refurbishment at Kelly Butte in summer 2026, including a new cedar roof.
- Lastly, we are looking forward to hosting the Western States conference in Sept 2026!

In summary, 2025 was a pretty good year for the WA Chapter and 2026 is shaping up to be a good year for FFLA in WA. We remain hopeful that we can continue to preserve and protect fire lookouts in Washington State for years to come.