



## **Forest Fire Lookout Association New York State Chapter Annual Report 2020**

New York State ended the year with 99 members (89 in 2019, 78 in 2018, and 66 in 2017). Of those, 27 are plus members. The numbers reflect 15 new members and 5 who did not renew, increasing by 10 overall.

Our Chapter had an opening balance of \$740.01 and a closing balance of \$1153.73. We received a number of donations during the year which allowed us to build our tool inventory for work projects. It also allowed us to provide refreshments to our hard working volunteers during work projects.

Fire activity around the state in 2020 included one major fire that swept along Mount Beacon burning about 300 acres in early March. There were several other small fires throughout the state with some very dry conditions due to lack of snow cover in the early spring and again in the fall. Many NYS Forest Rangers and other staff assisted with wild fires in the western US.

None of our towers are in active fire spotting service at this time. There were no tower rentals in 2020. Standing towers in NYS remained unchanged at 73.

Fire Tower inspection visits were affected by Covid-19 travel restrictions. I did 18 site visits.

I attended several planning meetings for the 2 new fire towers that we hope will go up in 2021. Some of these meetings were in person and some were remote, again due to Covid-19.

Several work projects were scheduled for 2020, but NYS closed all fire towers on March 27<sup>th</sup> and no work was able to occur. NYS reopened the fire towers on June 26<sup>th</sup> for public visitation, but volunteer work had to wait until Covid-19 protocols were developed. The Covid-19 situation also placed serious financial constraints on the NYS budget and affected work projects that were planned.

The restoration project at Pillsbury Fire Tower was able to happen as materials had already been flown into the site in 2019. FFLA was cleared to have up to 10 volunteers work on the tower beginning in August, but that work included an extra 1 ½ miles walk each way due to a road wash out and all tools had to be carried up the mountain. We were still able to have 2 work weekends on the mountain and got a great deal of work done. All tower steps have been replaced and 6 landings. We hope to complete this work in 2021.

FFLA volunteers also worked with Friends of Bramley Mountain to inventory fire tower parts for the Bramley Mt Project, worked with Warren County to build a new trail to Swede Mt Fire Tower and to repair safety fencing on Lyon Mt Fire Tower.

Our Facebook page now has 755 members, a significant increase from 2019 when we had just 471. The page is quite active with a monthly photo contest added in 2020 to a weekly column done by past NYS Director Fred Knauf on history every Thursday.

Our new Chapter web page went live in 2020. We continue to get positive reviews about the content and to add to that content routinely.

Our monthly newsletter is circulated electronically to over 200 recipients. We also snail mail a hand full of copies to those who request it.

This year marked our 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Lighting event held on Labor Day weekend. We had 24 fire towers who participated this year and our neighbors in New Jersey joined us as well! We had some strict guidelines for our volunteer luminaries to follow due to Covid-19, but it was a perfect social distancing event with perfect weather! This fun event really connects the fire towers to our local communities and showcases the importance of the history of our fire towers and the volunteers who are now taking such good care of them!

Our Chapter was very fortunate to receive several monetary donations from various individuals and groups to assist us in our work around the state. We also received very generous donations of old photographs, postcards and memorabilia.

Looking ahead to 2021, we have several work projects on various towers scheduled; completing our work on Pillsbury as well as work on several Observer's cabins (Vandewhacker in partnership with the NYSDEC and the Adirondack 46ers, Blue Mt and Kane Mt). There are plans actively going forward to reopen 2 towers to the public (Berry Hill and Swede) and for 2 towers to be erected (Bramley Mt returned to its original location and the historic Makomis Fire Tower to the Village of Speculator.) The FFLA has been actively involved in assisting with these projects and are very grateful for all of the partners and volunteers who are making these happen. We will continue to work with individual fire tower friends groups to provide technical assistance and resources as they may be needed. We still need to work on updating Lost Lookouts and the NHLR and we need to continue to recruit new members.

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