

2014 Maine Annual Report

The year 2014 was one of the most active years we have had in a long time. There were no new tower losses, but one loss in the survey due to a misidentified tower. Restoration efforts are slow, but the Squaw Mountain project is off of hold and moving! Other projects continue to be burdened by liability issues and the lack of a liability insurance policy. We had a large amount of members and friends of the chapter do site visits all over the state. Due to this, nearly every standing tower was visited this year!

We continued with research and archive collection, including several visits to Maine archival sites. We continue to maintain and grow our chapter Facebook presence and collected a variety of new information from it.

We continued to keep the Maine tower inventory up to date as there were changes, new discoveries and updates. The findings are below –

2014 Tower Survey

Data as of 12/30/2014

There was no significant change to the inventory this year. We are down one tower due to a misidentification from a past list. Some conditions continue to deteriorate.

Summary:

Total Known Tower Sites – 143
Total Towers Still Standing – 57
Total Towers Gone or Removed – 86

Of the 57 Standing Towers:

Standing Steel Only, No Cab – 20
Standing Steel Converted to Observation – 6
Standing Steel and Cab – 31
Standing Wooden Enclosed – 1

Average Condition of the 31 Standing Towers with Cabs:

Good Condition – 12
Fair Condition – 8
Poor Condition – 7
Bad Condition – 4

The full tower summary list can be found on the FFLA Web Site on the Lookout Library page under the Maine section. We will continue to update these lists as new information is found.

Tower Losses – None for 2014

Planned Removals – No concrete plans to remove anything, but at-risk towers are below:

1. **Mount Abraham**
2. **Johnston Hill**
3. **Pleasant Mountain**
4. **Almanac Mountain**

MSCommNet Project

The MSCommNet project is a statewide radio upgrade initiative that has had an effect on many mountain top summits and fire tower structures in Maine. The project has largely wound down with respect to our involvement. No new towers have been removed as part of this project.

Membership

Current membership in ME is at 27 members. We gained 6 new members this year, largely due to our Facebook presence. We did drop some members, but some have been found to have payments linked to fire departments and these will likely be reinstated once the billing is fixed. We have close to 100 other Facebook friends or folks that help out occasionally with research, trip reports, or tower reports. It is anticipated that a few of these can be converted into memberships.

NHLR

11 Total Entries

There were no new completed NHLR nominations for 2014, but Wadleigh Mountain Tower is in process and continues to waiting for State of Maine approval.

Research / Archives

We continued this past year with significant research on tower sites. Focused a lot of time re-scanning MFS photos and commissioners reports. Worked with various organizations to provide history and background data on towers and tower sites, including the Moosehead Historical Society.

Liability Challenges in Maine

We continue to hold on restoration projects on state owned/leased land until we can get private liability insurance. There does not seem to be any leads to solve this problem at this point in time.

Facebook Presence

The Maine Chapter Facebook Page continues to do well and has 1,500+ likes as of this writing. We continue to keep fresh content on the page, which is a key to keeping interest. We continue to see the below benefits -

- Increase in membership
- Connecting with many former watchman, yielding a wealth of info
- Connecting with the families of former watchman, yielding a wealth of info
- Provided a good mechanism for communication and outreach
- Is a good research tool
- Has created more exposure for the chapter

Activities

Big Moose Mountain (Squaw Mountain) Project

Back in 2011, the Natural Resource Education Center (NREC) in Greenville agreed to accept the removed tower and place it at their new visitor center on RT15 in Greenville. After some initial challenges, the project is really rolling!



The 1919 Big Moose Tower lays in a field next to the NREC facility on RT15 in Greenville. It was picked up and delivered to the Charleston Correctional Facility industrial shop in the fall of 2014.

The general plan is to restore the steel and rebuild the cab using the original 1958 cab plans. Once completed, the steel and cab will be trucked back to the Route 15 visitor's center in Greenville where it will be erected as an interpretive display. The restoration will be conducted at the Charleston Correctional Facility using inmate labor.



The 1919 Big Moose Tower after restoration in January 2015.

Wadleigh Mountain

FFLA member Dave Merchant has created a group called the “Friends of Wadleigh Mountain” with the primary purpose of spearheading a restoration effort for the Wadleigh mountain fire tower. A proposal has been written and presented to the State of Maine. The state is still considering the proposal and has budgeted some funds for structural evaluations, but no decisions have been made to date.

Fire Tower Talk #1 – Fire Lookouts of the Moosehead Region

The Maine chapter teamed up with the Moosehead Historical Society and gave a fire tower talk at the Center for Moosehead History in Greenville back in August. The talk featured John Boydston, former watchman at Big Spencer Mountain. Member Bill Spach also gave a short talk about his lookout experiences in the region. The remainder of the talk was a slide show of area historical lookouts given by Director Bill Cobb.

Fire Tower Talk #2 – Maine Fire Lookouts: From Beginning to Now

The Maine chapter teamed up with the Maine Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club and gave a fire tower slide show at the Curtis Memorial Library in Brunswick back in October. The feature of the evening was a historical presentation of the evolution of fire towers in Maine, ending with a slide show of current photos of the remaining tower inventory given by Director Bill Cobb.

Southern Maine Activities and Status

Volunteer towers Mount Agamenticus, Ossipee Hill, and Mount Hope have continued to operate during 2014. These towers continue to be most active during the dry spells.

Aggie

The tower is still manned by volunteers of the York Fire Department. Due to low fire danger for most of calendar 2014, there was a very low activity level at the lookout. We were not able to organize a repair effort this past year, but we did manage to get 6 willing volunteers from outreach. The windows need attention before anything else, and we will be driving toward getting that done in 2015.

Mount Hope

The Mt. Hope was staffed little this year, due to the turnover of volunteer watchman and the training cycle. The Sanford Call department continues to maintain the tower. I visited Mount Hope along with a member of the Sanford Call department this past summer and the lookout looks in good shape only needing some minor work.

Ossipee Hill

The tower was manned this year by a new volunteer. Jason Lheureux, the long-time regular volunteer watchman, was out of action for the year with back issues. It was reported that the tower received many visitors. School classes enjoy making the trip up the mountain every year. Regular watchman Jason Lheureux is planning on returning this year. This will be his 22nd year on the mountain as the watchman!

Other Activities

Made several tower site visits this past year. Trips included Mount Agamenticus, Mount Hope, Mount Kineo, Squaw Mountain, Number 4 Mountain, Tumbledown Mountain (2 trips), Williams Mountain, Sally Mountain, Green Mountain East Peak, Green Mountain West Peak, Wadleigh Mountain, Big Spencer Mountain, Coburn Mountain, Little Russell Mountain, Nulhedus Mountain, and Number 5 Mountain.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bill Cobb
Maine Director