

## 2010 Maine Annual Report

We continued to have an active year; however restoration efforts have been burdened by liability issues. This year we focused on research, archive collection, and managing the impact of Maine's new statewide radio system – MSCommNet. We continued to keep the Maine tower inventory up to date as there were changes, new discoveries and updates. The findings are below –

### Tower Survey

Data as of 12/30/2010

Summary:

Total Known Tower Sites – 143

Total Towers Still Standing – 64

Total Towers Gone or Removed - 79

Of the 64 Standing Towers:

Standing Steel Only, No Cab – 19

Standing Steel Converted to Observation Deck - 6

Standing Steel and Cab – 38

Standing Wooden Enclosed - 1

Average Condition of the 38 Standing Towers with Cabs:

Good Condition – 15

Fair Condition – 12

Poor Condition – 7

Bad Condition – 5

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

**Tower Losses** – There were 0 tower losses this year.

**Planned Removals** – The following towers may be removed in 2011:

1. **Almanac Mountain** tower was to be removed in 2010, but it was decided to only remove the cab at some point. As of October 2010, the tower was still intact.
2. **Bigelow Mountain** tower is still being recommended for removal by the Maine State DOC.
3. **Mount Abraham** tower is still being recommended for removal by the Maine State DOC

4. **West Kennebago** tower will likely be removed to make way for the new MSCommNet Radio tower. The landowner will not allow both to coexist, so the Fire Tower will be removed.
5. **May Mountain** tower will be removed to make way for the new MSCommNet Radio Tower. The current fire tower is only steelwork.
6. **Mount Blue** tower will be removed in early 2011 as part of the new MSCommNet Radio project. It was to be removed in late 2010, but bad weather cut the construction season short.

### **MSCommNet Project**

The MSCommNet project is a statewide radio upgrade initiative that will affect certain mountain top summits and fire tower structures. FFLA has worked with the state to understand the impact of the project and to help provide guidance to historic structures. The Maine State OIT office provided this statement to FFLA this past year:

“The MSCommNet Project will upgrade the State of Maine’s Land Mobile Radio infrastructure to deliver statewide, “mission critical” communications connectivity to enable immediate coordination of public safety resources in emergency situations to ensure the public’s safety and welfare.

- To coordinate the delivery of State government services to the citizens of Maine.
- To significantly enhance the safety of both the State’s public safety responders, and the citizens they serve.
- To more effectively and efficiently coordinate the deployment of state, federal and local government resources, in disaster and emergency situations, fostering partnerships throughout the State.

In the implementation of the MSCommNet Project a number of new and existing radio sites will have their towers and shelters upgraded and/or replaced. Decisions with respect to upgrade and replacement are based on the condition of the existing infrastructure and the State’s needs over the coming years considering the Public Safety mission of the MSCommNet system and related public safety communication system standards.

It is our objective to avoid actions that impact existing fire towers wherever possible. Many factors however impact the final outcomes at each radio site including; landowner requirements (whether a State Agency or a third party), lot size and placement of new structures within the lot, landing zone safety at helicopter access sites and the condition of the tower.”

FFLA will continue to work with the state as needed until this initiative is complete.

## **Membership**

Current membership in ME is at 19 members. We are down 4 members from last year.

Membership continues to be an issue with the Maine Chapter. Locating interested parties to become members has been challenging. We will be looking at incentive programs to improve the situation.

## **NHLR**

11 Total Entries

There were no new NHLR nominations for 2010. The 2 targets that we had for 2010 did not happen for various reasons. These will be followed up on this year.

## **Research / Archives**

We continued this past year with significant research on tower sites. Worked with various organizations to provide history and background data on towers and tower sites.

## **Liability Challenges in Maine**

While past Maine restorations have handled liability under various blankets such as the Parks and Lands volunteer rider and the Maine Tort Claims act, a request for permission to work on Rocky Mountain ended up going up to the State Attorney General's office this year. The ruling by the ADA was that the state required private liability insurance in all cases where private citizens/volunteer groups were to be working on towers. It had previously been ruled by lower state authorities that the Maine Tort Claims act would be sufficient to mitigate any state liability. At this point, restoration projects on state owned/leased land are on hold until we can investigate either private liability insurance, or investigate a way to cover volunteers under an existing state liability plan.

## **Activities**

### **Big Moose Mountain (Squaw Mountain) Project**

This project is an on-going effort that has currently been on hold. Due to recent challenges with liability insurance combined with the fact that the summit must undergo a cleanup of radio gear to build the new MSCommNet tower, this tower may be considered for removal. If it must be removed, FFLA has advocated relocating it rather than destroying it. We will be active in this effort until a decision is made.

### **Rocky Mountain Tower**

Just as plans for a Rocky Mountain tower restoration were firming up this past summer, a ruling by the Maine ADA was that the state required private liability insurance in all cases where private citizens/volunteer groups were to be working on towers. FFLA does not currently have a blanket policy and the local group that was going to work on the tower did not, so we had to stop the project. It should be recognized that throughout the long process of working through the insurance process, the Maine Forest Service was in complete support of the Rocky Mountain restoration project. Bill Greaves, a regional ranger in the Maine Forest Service northern region, worked very hard throughout the summer to assist FFLA in obtaining the necessary permissions and decisions. Unfortunately, there were higher authorities at work in this case.

This decision was especially hard for the team as the manpower had been lined up, funding was in place with an additional grant close to being acquired, and material lists ready for purchase. The Rocky Mountain tower has been in need of repairs for years and parts of it are badly rotting. A restoration this year was surely needed. At this point, the project is on hold until we can investigate what will satisfy the states requirements for insurance.

### **Other Projects**

Indian Hill – A project to restore the wooden tower on Indian Hill is still being considered, but cannot move forward because the land that the tower sits on changed hands recently. The Grand Lake Stream Historical Society is assisting with reaching out to the new landowner to see what their intentions are with the tower.

### **Bigelow AT Hike**

This past year, Eastern Deputy Director Peter Barr successfully hiked the AT. As part of that journey, FFLA member Bill Spach and myself met him on the AT section that traverses Bigelow Mountain. Bill and I hiked up the Horns Pond trail and met Peter just east of Horns Pond shelter. We then took the side trip to North Horn and then back to South Horn. We made the traverse across Bigelow to West Peak and then Avery Peak. It was a great day of views, AT stories, and lookout history. Bigelow is the site of one of the first fire towers in Maine, being erected in the later half of 1905.

### **Southern Maine Activities and Status**

All 3 volunteer towers in York County (Aggie, Ossipee, and Hope) have continued to operate during 2010. The towers continue to be active during the dry spells.

I visited volunteer watchman Jason L'Heureux, at the Ossipee Fire Tower this past summer and had a good visit. We discussed tower topics and also

reviewed some necessary repairs to the structure. The lookout interior is in great shape. At Mount Hope, the tower continues to be manned on high fire days and when a volunteer is available. Watchmen John Heseltine and Rusty Smith hosted a group of local school children at the Mount Hope fire tower over the course of a few days this past September. It was a good visit and it provided good awareness of the fire tower and its mission. At Agamenticus, the lookout continues to be manned when possible, but there continues to be challenges staffing it. There was a proposal to remove the tower in favor of an observation tower that would also house radio equipment for the state's new radio project, but it doesn't look like that will be happening.