



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
Annual Report 2024**

Membership: We had 121 members. New York ended the year with 121 members. (66 in 2017, 78 in 2018, 89 in 2019, 99 in 2020, and 121 in 2021, and 121 in 2022). Of those 121 members, 36 were plus members. The numbers reflect 9 new members and 12 who did not renew, keeping our numbers steady.

Financials: An opening balance of \$1155.77 and a closing balance of \$161.44. The acquisition of the magnificent Podskoch collection did cause us to spend one time funds on proper storage of the collection. Additionally, our steward programs cost a fair amount with the purchase of uniforms, patches, supplies, packs, give away items and more. We also were blessed to have a nice fund raiser in 2022, the cutting boards made by past Director Fred Knauf, but we did not have anything similar going on in 2023, thus far fewer donations.

Donations: In February of 2023, author of several fire tower books, Marty Podskoch very generously donated his entire collection of materials utilized in writing the books to the NYS Chapter. Additionally, we did receive 2 monetary donations in 2023 of \$300 and \$50 respectively.

Fire Activity: Smoke from Canadian wildfires was present across NYS on several days. We had some periods of high fire danger in the spring, with nearly 30 different fires reported, but none were large. Then the rains began and it remained a very wet summer and into most of the fall. The fall did see 2 fires, one in Allegheny county of 138 acres that may have been the largest in the state in 2023. Our Forest Rangers were deployed to other states across the US and to Canada on several occasions.

Site Visits: Visits were completed to 34 sites, some were multiple visits to the same site for work projects, training, and stewarding. Visits to Lost Lookout Sites – 1.

Stewardship: Stewardship programs were ongoing from Memorial Day through Columbus Day at Berry Hill, Dickinson Hill, Kane, and Stillwater fire towers. 2892 visitors were engaged at these programs. 66 volunteer stewards were all trained and participated in the programs.

Agreements with NYSDEC/NYSOPRHP: Berry Hill, Dickinson Hill, Kane, Stillwater, Spruce, Belfry, Vandewhacker, Wakely, Snowy, Owls Head, Blue, Lyon, Beebe Hill are all towers that we hold VSA's with NYSDEC for. We also continue to have a VSA application pending for Leonard Hill.

Meetings: I attended the FFLA Annual Meeting in January via Zoom, the Western and Eastern conferences in person and quarterly I attended the Catskill Park Advisory meetings for the FFLA.

New Towers: Buck Mountain fire tower did reopen to the public in September of 2023! There was also a new fire tower erected in Rensselaer County on private property. We hope to visit that tower in 2024. I believe our current standing towers are 78.

Monthly Newsletters: We continue to provide a monthly newsletter with news and history of New York, the Northeast and the country. We circulate this electronically to over 200 recipients and provide

a dozen snail mail newsletters too.

Lighting Event: In 2023 our 10th Annual Lighting of the Fire Tower event occurred. We had 37 towers participate across the state and we received a fair amount of media attention. Because it was our 10th annual event that honors and remembers those who served in our fire towers, we asked our Illuminators to please read the names of all those who served out loud. With so many people having smart phones to record the event, even those towers that were very remote and had no visitors were able to share these readings with others. It was a special night with variable skies (some had rain, some had clouds) and many community connections were made.

Outreach Events: We had a wide variety of outreach events around the state in 2023. We did a presentation at a school that was followed by a field trip to a tower. We did an astronomy event. We did a slide show presentation for a historical society. We did a slide presentation for a State Park. We participated in ADK Day at the State Legislature. We did three different podcasts, one with Papa Bear Hikes, one with Kaatscast, and one with Inside the Line: The Catskills Mountain Podcast. We attended a local town meeting. And we attended the Induction at the NYS Sportsmens Hall of Fame event.

Websites: Our website continues to be very active around the lighting event and showed us 5491 new hits for 2023. We have quite a bit of information on the site: www.nysffla.org and hope to begin to scan and add more from the Podskoch collection this winter.

Social Media: On Facebook we have 1682 members in our FFLA New York State Chapter group. That is an increase from last year. The page is quite active with several new posts per week. We have a very popular monthly photo contest as well.

NHLR/FFLOS: We submitted 1 application to NHLR and 1 application to FFLOS in the spring of 2023. Both were approved late in 2023. We will submit more in 2024 in an effort to get all towers listed.

Tower Closures: We have had several fire towers and Observer's cabins closed pending engineering inspections. Leonard Hill, Jackie Jones, Beebe Hill, Roosa Gap, Spruce, Loon Lake Mountain and Sterling fire towers are currently closed. Goodnow fire tower cab is currently closed. Balsam Lake Observer's cabin is currently closed. All of these closures await the results of engineering inspections. In some cases, the inspections have been done, but no reports have been done. In some cases these requests are more than 5 years old. During this time, any problems that have been identified are only getting worse.

Looking ahead to 2024: It is our sincere hope that Cross River, Rock Rift, and Bramley fire towers will be re-erected or re-opened in 2024. Both Rock Rift and Bramley are well positioned for this. Cross River is still a bit early in their planning stages. We hope to participate in more outreach opportunities. We will also be spending more time on recruitment and fund raising. As the Chapter grows, we need funding to do the work we have agreed to as well as volunteers to help us with that work. We rely completely on dues and donations and volunteers to accomplish our work.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Rankin, Director NYS Chapter