



ON THE LOOKOUT

From the
National Chairman
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WHAT MAKES A LOOKOUT HISTORIC?

My short answer to that question is usually: "everything!" But this is an important question, especially to the owner of the fire lookout, and deserves a good answer.

- At 50 years of age, any federal structure including lookouts gains special status under historic preservation laws.
- Most states require their agencies follow the federal guideline.
- All 50 states have a State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The U.S. Forest Service and other federal agencies must file a request to remove any historic structure (50 years or older).
- Lookouts of an unusual design become history because of their rarity, and most of these easily reach the 50-year mark, but not always.
- Lookouts can also be historic because of their ownership. For example, the only lookout ever built and staffed by a certain agency or private organization.
- The design or model of the cab is very historic. Lookout cabins evolved over the years. The L-4 wooden cab design of the USFS was most common in the west, but is becoming more rare over the years as fire and rot take their toll. Other federal agencies, and many states, developed their own series of cab designs. Examples of all of these are important and historic.
- There were many different designs of fire tower structures. Most were developed by the USFS, but some states did their own as well. These designs

were modified over the years, leading to a diverse list of structures.

-The manufacturer of a fire tower leads to historic distinctions. Aermotor made the majority of the metal towers, but there were five other important manufacturers.

WHAT MAKES A LOOKOUT IMPORTANT?

The foregoing eight subjects describe historic differences only. Many other considerations are evaluated when determining what makes a lookout important:

-Fire lookouts are still important in much of the United States for fire detection. Their role is returning as experience shows they work well with airplanes, but airplanes are not a satisfactory replacement, especially when early detection is important.

-Small landowners can only afford small wildfires. This is especially important in the Wildland/Urban Interface (WUI).

-The earlier the detection, the better the chance a fire will be controlled with initial attack. With the huge and growing cost of multi-day wildfire incidences, this is becoming more important.

-Fire lookouts are as widely recognized a symbol of wildfire prevention as Smokey Bear.

-Fire lookouts are an important reminder of the importance of forests and forestry in our society as well as the history of America.

-Lookouts, fire towers in particular, serve as important landmarks.

-People are willing to restore and rent lookouts when not needed for detection.

-20% of the lookout staffing in the U.S. is done by volunteers. This presents a great opportunity for people to give back to their community, but they can't do that if the lookout is no longer there.

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND A JUNE CONFERENCE

Our two summer meetings, western and eastern, are our most popular events and a wonderful way to connect with fellow members. Both conferences are coming up soon, only two weeks apart, in June. Chris Haartz has a great program set for the eastern event June 11-13 in Moultonborough, New Hampshire. Eastern Deputy Peter Barr is planning a detour from his thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail to be there. The western meeting will be in Grangeville, Idaho, June 24-27. The Clear-Nez Fire Zone is one of the most

active areas for staffed lookouts, with seventeen normally staffed in the zone.

I look forward to sharing “lookout magic” with many of you at these summer meetings!

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