

Kane Mountain Fire Tower Steward Handbook

This handbook contains valuable information related to Kane Mountain Fire Tower and its history. Its purpose is to be a guide for volunteer stewards. While we don't expect you to know all of the material contained herein, we do hope you will familiarize yourself with this handbook so that it can help you in your role as a volunteer steward. Please review it as needed.



CANADA LAKES CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Intro/Background: The New York State Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association (FFLA) and the Canada Lake Conservation Association (CLCA) hold Volunteer Stewardship Agreements with the NYS DEC for the Kane Mountain Fire Tower. Stewardship is defined as an ethic that embodies the responsible planning and management of resources.

In your role as a Kane Mountain Fire Tower Steward, you will be representing the NYS Chapter of the FFLA and the CLCA at all times. You will also be representing the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

Volunteer Stewards: Volunteer Stewards are in a unique position to make a major impact on the thousands of visitors recreating in the outdoors of New York State. Stewards are able to see the pleasure on the hiker's faces when they reach the tower, to answer questions regarding the history of fire towers and the people who staffed them. They provide information regarding the rules and regulations of the area, the flora and fauna in the area, the nearest place to camp, lodging, dining, and to purchase a map. This makes them an excellent community resource.

Your Responsibilities: Complete Individual VSA forms and return to the Volunteer Coordinator. Laurie Rankin via email lauriejrankin@gmail.com or via snail mail 129 View Road Bloomville, NY 13739

Scheduling: Please pick a day or days that you would like to volunteer when the schedule is emailed to you. You are expected to be at the summit from 10 – 3 on the day(s) you sign up. We may adjust the hours as we see differing needs due to visitation.

Personal Safety: All wilderness safety begins with your personal safety, then your partners personal safety, then the public's, and then any patients you may encounter. Your personal safety is the first item of concern. Begin the day with a fully charged cell phone. Check for any possible reception where you are. Then place your phone in airplane mode. Be aware of the weather and dress appropriately for sedentary work. Bring water and snacks. You are likely to eat more than you expected. If it is a chilly day, a thermos of hot beverage is helpful. Be prepared with water, winter hat and gloves, windbreaker, insect repellent and sunscreen. Do a tick check at the end of your shift. Be aware of dogs not on leash. Do not be confrontational. Do not lend your personal gear to others.

Steward Responsibilities

Greeting visitors is always your first priority. As time allows, please also consider taking care of maintenance, such as painting, repairs, cleaning, trail work, etc.

Communication with the Coordinator and other volunteers is important as we do not often see each other. Please take time to document the visitor numbers and donations in the 'Notes to Next Shift' book. Additional information may also be pertinent such as any difficulty you encountered, graffiti, weather conditions, wildlife sightings, or more. **Communicate with the coordinator at the end of your shift that you are safe, and report any safety issues immediately!** You can email me at lauriejrankin@gmail.com or text or phone 845-926-2182 or private Facebook message, but please let me know you are out safely.

Promotional Materials are available to visitors free of charge. Smokey Bear is a national fire prevention campaign and materials have always been offered to remind visitors of the human role in preventing forest fires, particularly young visitors. Please encourage visitors to take these materials. We also have LNT and hikeSafe materials to share.

Beginning and End of Shift

Stop at the Canda Lakes store and pick up the back pack of materials to distribute; LNT cards, hikeSafe cards, Smokey Bear materials. Small first aid kit, notebook for communication, pens, litter bags, masks, gloves, spray paint to cover graffiti should all be in the back pack. You should bring your own backpack with food and water and extra clothing for the day. Additionally, there is a second bag that contains items for trailhead parking pick up. This bag has a whisk broom, dustpan, garbage bags, tp, gloves and clorox wipes to police the privy, register box, and parking area. You can leave this in your car and do not need to carry it to the summit.

Accidents and Injuries: A first aid kit is located in the back pack. It contains such items as Band-aids and first aid cream, and other items to treat minor medical emergencies. Any accidents or injuries **MUST** be reported to the Coordinator at the end of the day. All volunteers taking part in activities must have completed a VSA. * Form attached. Once completed, this VSA covers the individual for liability and workers compensation protection. Please note that to be covered for this when seeking medical care, **DO NOT** use your own personal insurance, but rather state that this is a Workmen's Compensation matter as you were injured while performing volunteer duties for NYSDEC. If you submit to your own personal insurance first, you have automatically waived the use of Workmen's Compensation.

***No motorized saws (chainsaws or brush saws) may be used.

***No motorized vehicles may be used to transport supplies unless approved by DEC.

Interpreter Hints

If possible and staffing allows, it is always best to work in pairs. One person can be in the tower while the other is on the ground. This allows an opportunity to speak with all visitors, including those who may not be comfortable climbing the tower, and it also provides security for both the tower and the cabin, including the volunteer's gear. If it is occasionally necessary to work solo, it is best to greet visitors in the tower if weather permits. Always be in uniform. While you do **NOT** have any authority to enforce regulations of any kind, the presence of the uniform and patches generally garners respect and adherence to the regulations. Remember, you represent the FFLA, CLCA, and the NYSDEC.

Greet visitors in a friendly manner and explain your presence. Remember for some this will be their first hike, their first fire tower, or possibly their completion of a list – all visitors are unique. Beginning a conversation with a visitor by saying, “welcome and what brings you to Kane Mountain Fire Tower today?”, you can get an initial idea of the reason for the visit. Invite visitors to climb the tower to enjoy the views. You can explain to the visitor that an alidade map was utilized when spotting smoke. Aiming the alidade (metal pointer in the center of the map which was specific to each fire tower location), noting the compass bearing and the time and possible location of the smoke. The Observer would then radio/phone nearby towers and

ask if they spotted the smoke and gather their compass bearings. There was either a phone or a radio in the fire tower cab. Ideally, three towers would note the smoke with compass bearings and where those three lines intersected would be the location of the fire. It was a very accurate system. The triangulation or meeting of those three compass bearings was as accurate as a GPS coordinate is today. The phone was attached to the wall of the cab. Communication was imperative to the observer's job. By checking in with the District Ranger each morning upon arrival, the observer knew the system was working. The other important tool to help in locating fires was the binoculars. The observer could use these to help determine a more precise fire location.

Safety on the Tower – The limit of 6 on the tower is due to limited floor space in the cab, not due to structural integrity. **NO ONE SHOULD BE ON THE TOWER DURING AN ELECTRICAL STORM!** At the first sign of a storm, immediately evacuate yourself and all visitors from the fire tower. Remind visitors to watch their head as they enter and exit the fire tower cab.

A note about objective/subjective information that you may share with visitors: Objective information is factual information that can be shared with visitors, such as “It’s a 1.8 mile round trip hike with 670 foot elevation gain from the East Trail to the summit and back. That information will always be the same, no matter which visitor asks. Subjective information would be answering the question “How long will it take me to get down if I go the long way”. The answer depends on a number of variables. It may take one visitor 1 hour and another 4 hours depending on their physical abilities, experience, weather, and preparedness. Be cautious in answering questions that may provide misleading information to a visitor. Try to stick to objective, factual information only.

Laminates: Let it Rot? Microtrash

Educate and Engage the Public: Use the information in this handbook to assist you in your duties and refer to it often. It is ok to do so. In your uniform you will be perceived as an expert on back-country information. Therefore, the information you give will be trusted and expected to be accurate. Use the right approach for your audience. (example you may connect differently with a child versus a senior). **Suggest behavior changes, don't demand them.** Be aware that not everyone will respond positively to your presence. Remain polite at all times, offer to go up in the fire tower cab and point out items, illustrate how a map worked, etc. If possible, speaking side to side rather than face to face, making you appear less authoritative to a visitor. Remember you are representing the FFLA, CLCA, and the NYSDEC.

Points to consider:

- Initiate conversation that allows you to connect with the individual you are speaking with (example – are you working on climbing all NYS fire towers? If the answer is yes, you could ask how many they have done. If they say this is their first one you can say they have picked an awesome one.) Forging either an emotional or intellectual bond will make the visitor more open to your conversation and education.
- Ask if you could see the person's map so you can show them an item, such as the nearest camping area or state park. Often they do not have a map and this gives you an opportunity to encourage the purchase of a map. If you show them that item on your

own map, be sure and retain your own map. You can suggest they photograph your map. If they are hiking with information gained solely from an internet source that may be inaccurate, offer an internet source that is accurate.

- Remind hikers that our trails are deceptively rugged and often eroded. They should have adequate footwear, walk on boulders whenever possible, and through mud down the center of the trail for their safety and to protect the resource from further erosion. Do the Rock Walk!
- Provide information about camping rules and regulations, it is preferred that visitors camp at designated sites.
- Group separation is the number one cause of search and rescue. If you come as a group, stay together as a group. Sign in and out of the trailhead register. Travel at the pace of the slowest hiker in the group and adjust as needed.
- Politely discourage illegal behavior with common sense and friendly persuasion.
- **Avoid confrontations.** Inform coordinator and NYSDEC of any illegal behavior.

Social Media: Please be thoughtful regarding use of your own personal social media when sharing information regarding the Kane Mountain Fire Tower. Any items posted should be in keeping with the FFLA, CLCA, NYS DEC, the VSA, and this handbook.

Handling Emergencies

NYS DEC Emergency Contact Numbers 24 Hour Statewide Emergency Dispatch

833-697-7264

**NYSDEC Forest Ranger Chelsea Geyer
Phone: 315-729-2683**

For a major medical emergency, you can contact 911 particularly if this emergency occurs at the trailhead. If the emergency involves a lost individual or a medical emergency on the trail that may require carry out, contact the DEC Emergency Dispatch number.

Remember you are not a rescuer – your role in an emergency of any type will be to be a conduit of information. To be the most effective reporter possible, gather as much information as possible prior to making your call. When reporting an emergency you will be asked the who, what, where, and when of the emergency. Write these items

down so that you report the information as accurately as possible. If you are reporting information as a third party, keep the other reporter with you if possible. Remain calm.

Protect the Resource

LNT Principles

We strongly encourage you to take the LNT on line course for some helpful hints on sharing the LNT message. <https://lnt.org/get-involved/training-courses/online-courses/> The course entitled Leave No Trace: Take Action to Protect the Outdoors is the one we recommend.

1 – Plan ahead and prepare – What route are you taking today? How long is it? How much elevation gain is there? What is today's weather forecast? Understand the regulations. Follow LNT Principles.

2 – Travel and camp on durable surfaces. Trails are built with switchbacks to prevent erosion. Stay on trails rather than take the shortest route. Walk through mud in the center of the trail or step on rocks. Do the Rock Walk.

3 – Dispose of Waste Properly – The Pit Privy located at the trailhead should be utilized. If you travel with a canine companion, please be sure to clean up after your pet and dispose of that waste properly by taking it out with you.

4 – Leave What you find. Take photographs of wildflowers and rocks.

5 – Minimize Campfire Impacts. You must camp at least 150 feet from roads, trails, and water or at a designated site. Camping at designated sites is preferred if possible.

6 – Respect wildlife. The rule of thumb is to extend your arm and then cover the animal with your thumb. If you cannot cover the entire animal, then you are too close. Mothers protect their young, animals lose their fear of humans.

7 – Be considerate of other visitors. Photographers, birders, hunters, boaters, scientists, and others may also be using the forest preserve lands. Be considerate of their visit as well as yours.

Littering: How long does it take for an orange peel to decompose – 6 months? A banana peel – 4 weeks? Pistachio shells? Egg shells? These last 2 do not really decompose, but rather just become smaller in size. Suggest visitors use small litter bags to encourage carry it in, carry it out. *use laminated poster to illustrate

Microtrash: Often the trash we find alongside a trail is small and is inadvertently dropped. Whenever you take something out of your pocket, look down and make sure nothing fell out, such as a used tissue. When stopping for a snack, make sure the corner of that granola bar wrapper did not accidentally fall to the ground. *use laminated poster to illustrate

HikeSafe

Hiker Responsibility Code

You are responsible for yourself, so be prepared:

- 1 – With knowledge and gear.
- 2- Leave your plans.
- 3 – To stay together.**
- 4 – To turn back.
- 5 – For emergencies.
- 6 – To Share the hiker code with others.

**Group separation is responsible for over 80% of Search and Rescue. Please go as a group and stay together as a group.

Ten Essentials

- **Map
- **Compass
- **Warm clothing
- **Extra food and water
- **Flashlight or headlamp
- **Matches/fire starters
- **Whistle
- **First Aid Kit/Repair Kit
- **Rain/Wind Gear
- **Pocket Knife

Kane Mountain Fire Tower History and History of NYS Fire Towers

A 60' Aeromotor LS 40 fire tower was erected at the summit of Kane Mountain in 1925 by the Conservation Commission. The summit elevation is 2060'. It became operational in the spring of 1926. It is located in Fulton County in the southwest corner of the Adirondack Park about 3 miles from the village of Caroga Lake. This location and the height of the fire tower allowed coverage over a significantly large area that was frequented by hikers, campers, and fisherman. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places 9-23-01. It is number US 111 on the NHLR and NY#10. The tower was staffed through the 1988 season and officially decommissioned in the spring of 1989.

A Timeline of Fire Towers in NYS

1885 Forever Wild clause to the NY Constitution began, creating millions of acres of forever wild forest.

1887 – The first fire tower in NYS was erected on the summit of Balsam Lake Mt in the Catskills. It was a wooden tower that was struck by lightning and burned down in 1901.

1903 – The year the Adirondacks went dark. A 72 day drought occurred, Lake Champlain dropped 33 inches and fires began to occur. The fires ultimately burned over 600,000 acres in the Adirondacks alone. They were centered at Lake Placid. Fires also raged around the Adirondacks in Schroon Lake, Lake George, Olmsteadville, Newcomb, Ausable Forks, Saranac Lake and Clintonville. The fires were so significant that there were reports of cinders falling as far away as Albany, N.Y., 150 miles south of Lake Placid. 6,487 men were hired to work the fires. The smoke from the fires even caused concern in Washington, D.C.

1908 - Late September marked the climax of this fire season, with the worst single fire of all destroying the small community of Long Lake West, now Sabattis, N.Y. The fire was started on September 9, 1908 by the passing Mohawk & Malone locomotive when it shot off a spark that landed in trackside tinder. Other trains rushed men in to fight the fire. Additional trains and sparks further contributed to the blaze. It was reported that flames had spread all along the track from Horseshoe to Nehasane, a distance of 12 miles. The Long Lake West fire destroyed everything in its path. While residents were evacuated, nothing was left of the town except charred embers. The heat generated by the fire melted barrels of nails into lumps. Miles of forest surrounding the town were incinerated along with a dozen homes, the church, a school, the Wilderness Inn, a livery stable with room for 200 horses that had been set free to fend for themselves, and Moynihan's storehouse and freight warehouse containing 50 barrels of kerosene and 1,500 pounds of dynamite. The intense heat of this fire even twisted railroad track. While the Long Lake West fire was not the only one of late September as fires raged all over the Adirondacks, it was by far the most destructive.

1909 – There were 9 Observation Towers across the state. Cabins were varied, some stone huts, lean-tos, and tents. Communication was via a variety of methods including Signal flags, morse code, phones, and mirrors.

1911 – Conservation Commission established a permanent force of about 50 men that should be employed during the entire year at a salary of \$720 per year. The title of Fire Superintendent or Superintendent of Fires should be changed to District Forest Ranger and Fire Patrolman to Forest Ranger.

1913 – The Makomis fire occurred, once men were rounded up it took them days to hike to it and 2 months to extinguish.

1922 - The first standard design for observer's cabins was developed, mandating that the cabin be 12' x 16' in size and roofed and sided with asphalt shingles. Laws prohibiting the leaving of slash or cut brush adjacent to highways and railroad right of ways has been enforced. Practically all observation station telephone lines connected with the long distance commercial lines. In the spring of 1922 a representative from the Mountain Home Telephone

Co examined NYS lines that connected with theirs to determine what should be done to make our lines standard. A program was adopted for the repairing and rebuilding of our lines to meet their requirements. Each ranger was supplied with a "Double Forester" Pump consisting of a 10 gallon tank and short length of hose. A real need was felt for a pump which could be carried conveniently anywhere in the woods by one man and that could be operated by the man as he walked along. A new type of French pump was obtained in early 1923 and supplied to the District Rangers for testing. This proved satisfactory and it is planned to equip each ranger with one in the near future. The work of fighting forest fires was assigned by law to the town supervisors and the bills were paid by the towns. Local jealousies and the tendency to fight fires along town lines and neglect them if in the other towns was a difficulty.

1923 – A radical change in organization began. Fire Districts rather than Fire Towns were established by NYS to provide organized, consistent coverage. Each of these had a certain number of towers, fire wardens, rangers and budget. The Commission appoints fire wardens and through its district rangers directs the work of fighting fire. The men who have done good work in fighting fires in the past will be retained as fire wardens. The advantage of the change is that the fire preventive work is centralized under one head – the Conservation Commission and made uniform throughout the entire area embraced by the Fire Districts. Fire bills also are paid by the Commission, as they are in the fire towns, one-half of the amount of these bills being rebated at the end of the fire season by the towns in which the fires occurred. Railroads were required to attach spark arrestors to their stacks. Right of way inspections and locomotive inspections were to be done. In reality, few were and fires continued. There was also an effort to require use of oil burners rather than wood or coal to fuel trains in the summer months. That was voted down in favor of the spark arrestors.

In 1923 there were

- 59 towers

- 556 fires extinguished in the fire towns.

- 236 fires extinguished in the fire districts.

- 753 were reported by observation stations in the fire towns.

- 363 were reported by observation stations in the fire districts.

- 32,013 people visited fire observation stations.

1926- flags issued flown only when Observer was on duty, uniforms issued

1932- radio trials began in 5 locations for purposes of reporting fires. Prior to that, telephones were utilized and Fire Tower Observers maintained the lines as part of their daily work.

1942 - 94 fire towers now and the addition of planes: 25,804 miles were flown by the Department plane, of which 20,947 were on fire patrol

1943 - Vacancies in the observer force at the opening of the season amounted to 40% . Women began to be utilized to staff fire towers. The efficient operation of forest fire observation stations is of increasing importance. If forest fires are to be quickly extinguished, the rangers or fire wardens must receive prompt notification of their occurrence so that suppression measures may be undertaken while the fire is still small. A few new observers can be worked into the organization each year without seriously reducing the efficiency of the group. However, the present high turnover has resulted in large areas being entirely devoid of

experienced observers. It's become necessary to develop a new system for locating forest fires. Most rangers and observers in the Adirondacks were supplied with the newly developed maps, by which fires may be located by intersecting lines. Less experienced observers should be able to report the location of fires more accurately by this method.

1946: No phase of the work has suffered more from the war than has the detection system. Inability to compete in the labor market has resulted in an excessive turnover in personnel. This continued over a series of several years, this has gradually eliminated the experienced observers and replaced them with inexperienced personnel or has resulted in many towers remaining unmanned.

1947: Although there is an improvement in the observer personnel, the small salary paid to these essential employees affords no attraction to competent men. Until the job of observer is able to retain a high grade of employee, fire suppression activities in New York must continue to suffer. There are now 97 towers in the State. Pd \$82 per month from April until November. Raise to \$133.90 per month.

1950: 99 towers and Until July 1, 1950 annoying interference was experienced from other emergency services. On this date, all emergency radio services began operating on new frequency channels assigned to them by the FCC under a nation-wide master plan, which provided for more effective utilization of available channels.

1952 – 106 towers, 2009 fires reported, 82,000 visitors

1968 - Tests of a new knapsack sprayer, known as the Indian pump, made by **D B Smith of Utica** were conducted with such success that 600 of these were purchased and put in use.

Observer's Job Duties: A Fire Tower observer was generally a seasonal job with duties starting on April 1st each year and going through November 1st depending on weather conditions. In some years, dry weather would cause an early spring fire season (more commonly known as high fire danger) and the observer may have worked outside of those dates. A typical day began with checking the phone line en route to the tower and making any necessary repairs. Sometimes this was done on foot and sometimes with a jeep, depending on weather conditions. Often there was still deep snow at higher elevations and the observer might drive part of the way, then snowshoe the remainder of the way. There were bragging rights to be had among the Fire Tower observers if you got your jeep to the top first in the spring of the year. Sometimes that meant a lot of shoveling, sometimes that meant the weather was helpful.

You were to sign in via phone or radio at 8:00 A.M. Once communication was done solely by radio, all of New York State heard your sign in "Kane Fire Tower in service." It was much like a modern day time clock and everyone knew if you were on time for work. Often a mention of weather and visibility would follow. Careful watch of the surrounding lands would allow the observer to see a fire as soon as smoke was visible, calculate the location, double check the location with other towers (triangulation) and report the fire to a Forest Ranger. In this manner, fires were quickly extinguished before they had a chance to spread. The fire tower was like a modern day smoke detector of the forest. Careful record keeping was an essential part of the job. The number and location of the fires was always recorded. These reports were turned into the Forest Ranger weekly. During times of high fire danger, observers would be expected

to work 7 days a week and even monitor fire movement at night. When other work was required and assigned by the Forest Ranger, the observer would work away from the tower such as trainings, search and rescue, survey line painting, litter pick up, trail work, and even removal of other fire towers.

Public relations – First year of operation 2,535 hikers were noted to have climbed to the summit.

Kane Fire Tower Observers: There were 17 different observers on duty from 1926 to 1988. The Observers worked in District 10, Region 5.

James C. Luff Johnstown, NY \$100.00 month 1926 May - 1934 July 8
Edwin C. Johnston Caroga Lake, NY \$100.00 month 1934 July 8 - 1935 Oct 31
Stephen Spencer Gloversville, NY \$100.00 month 1936 Apr 29 - 1936 Apr 30
Lewis C. Burgess Gloversville, NY \$100.00 month 1936 May - 1936 Oct
James Haynor Johnstown, NY \$100.00 month 1937 Apr - 1939 May 31
Everett "Buckshot" Smith Canada Lake, NY \$100.00 month 1939 June - 1942 Oct
Fred Austin Canada Lake, NY \$100.00 month 1943 May - 1943 Oct.
Everett "Buckshot" Smith Canada Lake, NY \$100.00 month 1944 Apr - 1945 Oct
Frank A. Rogers Gloversville, NY \$100.00 month 1946 Mar 30 - 1946 Apr 12
Robert E. Mastropolo Johnstown, NY \$100.00 month 1946 May 3 - 1946 July 31
Everett "Buckshot" Smith Canada Lake, NY \$100.00 month 1946 Aug - 1946 Oct
David Clark Johnstown, NY \$133.90 month 1947 Apr - 1947 July
Everett "Buckshot" Smith Canada Lake, NY \$133.90 month 1947 Aug - 1949 Oct
Rex Hall Caroga Lake, NY \$172.50 month 1950 Apr - 1952 Nov
Everett "Buckshot" Smith Canada Lake, NY \$204.26 month 1953 Apr - 1955 June
Floyd H. Waters Wells, NY \$204.26 month 1954 May 1 - 1965 Oct 27
Gilbert C. Topliff Northville, NY \$214.47 month 1955 Apr 22 - 1955 Apr 22
Everett "Buckshot" Smith Canada Lake, NY \$147.88 bi-weekly 1966 June - 1972 Nov
Everett "Buckshot" Smith Canada Lake, NY \$3.24 hourly 1977 May - 1977 Nov
Eric C. "Rick" Miller Nelliston, NY \$3.24 hourly 1978 May - Oct 1983
Jan Duga N/A N/A 1984
Bill Rockwell, Jr. N/A N/A 1985 - 1986
Jim Wylie N/A N/A 1987 - 1988

Some observers were on duty for a short time only, some for a bad fire season only. The observers were only hired seasonally and dependent on the political party that was elected in the fall, you may or may not be reappointed in the spring. Buckshot Smith was a well known Observer at Kane Mountain who had to change political parties to keep his job.

Marty Podskoch speaks to the wife of Buckshot Smith in his book **Adirondack Fire Towers: The Southern District**. She shares what it was like for a family to be on the summit. *"Everybody called my husband Buckshot because when he first started hunting, he used a shotgun. He loved to hunt and fish and was always outdoors. When he heard there was an opening for the Observer's job on Kane Mt he went through hell to get it. On a cold winter day in 1929 we drove his 1929 Model A Ford to Northville to see the District Ranger, C. E. Roberts. Roberts told him he would have to register as a Democrat. My husband wanted that job so bad, he switched parties."* *"We were newleyweds. We lived in the Observer's cabin. Each day I had to walk down the hill for a pail of water. Buckshot did not eat breakfast. He*

just had a cup of coffee and was at the tower by 8am. At 10, I took him a pitcher of cold tea. He usually came down at lunch time for potatoes, pickles, canned peas and meat. We took our first child, Arnie to the cabin in the spring of 1940. We caught rainwater in a barrell from the roof for our needs."

"The Observer's job ended in November just as hunting season began. Then Buckshot would draw logs. In 1943 he did not return to the tower, but kept working in the woods. But in 1944 he heard the Observer's position was open again. He returned to the tower." This pattern would continue for several years. "He was so happy working at the tower and that's why he'd leave his other jobs and go back to the tower." The state had a law that said retirement was mandatory at age 70, thus in 1977 Buckshot came down off the tower for the last time. Forest Rangers all say that Buckshot was an excellent Observer and could pinpoint a fire well.

Memories from Rick Miller, Observer at Kane from 1978-1983:

Primary duty was of course fire detection. In my 6 seasons there I didn't report many fires. I do remember only 2 of the 6 seasons were very dry, 1979 and 1982. The largest fire I reported was about ¼ to ½ acre on an island on Nine Corner Lake which isn't very far away. I didn't need the map for that one. I do remember a lightning strike near Indian Lake that became a rather difficult fire for the Rangers. It could have been easily reported by the Snowy Mt. Tower which was of course closed. Not sure if the Observer at Gore saw it. It is possible.

Public relations was a big part of my job and I enjoyed that. I didn't get an overwhelming amount of hikers like Blue or Rondaxe Mt so I had many opportunities to talk with people, some I still know. I had several repeat visitors that I looked forward to seeing each season. There were several opportunities to be the "public educator" when young kids joined their parents on the hike. I'd like to think I made a lasting impression. One boy from Liverpool, NY whose family had a camp on Pine Lake used to come up with his friend and always brought his telescope. Well one day I asked if they wanted to go up Tomany Mt to a different tower with the telescope. So after work I left the tower and went to meet his parents and then hiked Tomany. The view from there was more expansive than Kane and with a powerfull telescope we "zerod-in" on several other towers and peaks. Mt. Marcy was one. I would say of all the visitors, about 99% were good folks. Always get a few not so desireable.

Also I did the usual trail work to keep things clear and phone line repairs when necessary. Occassionally Ranger Dave Countryman would help but the majority of the phone line troubles I could handle myself.

Some of the tower and cabin maintenance I could do myself. The more major projects were done by DEC Operations ie cabin porch, tower landings and stairs although I did handle the painting duties myself which I didn't have to. In May 1982, I acquired stain and aluminum paint and proceeded to stain the cabin and paint the tower. 3 ½ days and I was finished. I think the Ranger and I were the only two people who knew of my project. I'm sure I used a couple of unconventional methods painting the tower, but they were conveniently forgotton – lol. I used a long mop handle with a small exterior roller attached and could reach many spots. Paint brush used for the small areas. I used the roller for the roof using a bar stool given to me by a friend and could hang on and look outside and see the roof. The stool was just high enough. Retired Ranger Holton Seeley said they used to use a mirror attached to a handle and paint "backwards". I started at the bottom and worked my way up. You know, the

Observer on Dairy Hill gave me the idea of the roller. I was visiting him one day and he had done some of his tower that way.

Radio communications were a part of my job. A few times manning the radio after hours during a search. One I remember was a hiker who fell from T Lake Falls near Piseco. Ranger Countryman was part of that search and I recall him saying that the hiker had fallen into a pool at the bottom and was still alive. His girlfriend had hiked out 6 miles to get help. When the Rangers got there the hiker had passed. He was banged up internally. There were 2 or 3 fatalities there when I was Observer but I only remember that one.

I did do a few other duties when asked which didn't happen often. I did come down to play Smokey Bear for kindergarteners at the Gloversville Jewish Community Center. Ranger Countryman didn't tell me what he wanted until got there – lol. How could I say no?

I did have a good time doing the job and liked to think I made a good impression on the public. The public as a whole were and I'm sure still are good people. I felt fortunate also to have almost zero vandalism in 6 seasons. Once I came in the cabin after my days off and found a broken window pane and a cheap pocket watch stolen, that's it. No complaints.

Forest Ranger Job Duties: The Forest Ranger had to protect the lands within the Forest Preserve. His duties included fire suppression and prevention, finding lost people, protecting state timber lands from illegal logging and supervision of fire tower observers and fire Wardens. The NYS Forest Ranger worked out of his home and his truck, not from a cabin as is often thought. Prioritizing their duties was often dependent on the weather and time of year. During spring and fall fire seasons, Rangers spent most of their time fighting fires and finding crews to fight them. Documenting work hours so crews could get paid was also his responsibility. The pay was low, \$.35 an hour in the 1960's and the work was difficult. The Ranger could deputize anyone to fight a fire. The Rangers trained those they supervised. The Forest Ranger worked side by side with the observer to repair phone lines, fire towers, and cabins if necessary. The Forest Rangers would oversee several fire towers, fire tower observers and fire wardens. Search and rescue work occurred year round. Assistance with trail maintenance and even survey crew work also happened when there was no active fire season.

Forest Rangers that covered the Kane Mountain Fire Tower area:

Emeron Baker 1925 - 1946

Holton Seeley 1946 – 1978

Bill Rockwell 1982 – 1986

Richard VanLaer 1987 – 1989

David Countryman 1989 – 1994

John Ploss 1994 - 2017

David Nally 2017 – 2022

Chelsea Geyer 2023 - present

The End of an Era

Beginning in the 1980s, the State of New York began to phase out the use of fire towers for spotting forest fires. Advances in technology and communication as well as a general change in lifestyle diminished the role of fire towers. Lifestyle changes included logging practices that had changed, transportation changed from trains to automobiles, trash went to landfills instead of people burning it in their backyard, fewer people smoked, campers used cook stoves rather than campfires for cooking, and airplanes became common. Kane Mountain Fire Tower was closed for good in 1989.

The towers and cabins that were not dismantled were closed to the public for safety reasons. Over time, the towers and their associated observer's cabins began to deteriorate. The fire towers and cabins were subject to vandalism which often left them exposed to the elements as well as additional vandalism and even use by wildlife. Fire tower windows were broken, landing boards and steps deteriorated.

Local residents began a “Don't Raise Kane – Save the Fire Tower” movement following the closure. The Canada Lakes Protective Association signed an agreement with NYS DEC to repair and maintain the fire tower and trails.

In 2018 the NYS Chapter of the FFLA signed an agreement with NYS DEC to maintain the fire tower and Observer's cabin. In working with the DEC suggestions were made for improvements to the trailhead parking and the inclusion of a pit privy, all of which the DEC did provide. Additionally, the NYS DEC has worked with the local Town to have the trailhead parking plowed in the winter.

In the Fall of 2021, the NYS DEC replaced the roof on the Observer's cabin, repaired the porch and secured the cabin from additional vandalism. Along with FFLA volunteers, the DEC stained the cabin as well.

Today, with the popularity of hiking, wide spread publicity via the internet, the encouragement to achieve hiking challenges such as the Fulton County Five and the ADK Fire Tower challenge, as well as word of mouth and family traditions, the tower's popularity has continued to increase. The visitor numbers will likely continue to increase.

The Kane Fire Tower Crew: A volunteer is one who “freely offers to take on a task”. The crew at Kane is a special volunteer group who freely take on the task of hiking to the summit to greet visitors and share a wealth of information. They freely agree to repair and maintain the structures on the summit. They have a special love for the mountain and its history, both human and natural. Without them, none of this happens. They deserve a great deal of thanks.

The volunteers are in a unique position to make a major impact on those thousands of visitors to the Mountain. They are able to see the pleasure on the hiker's faces when they reach the summits, to answer questions regarding the history of the Adirondack Park, the history of fire towers and the people who staffed them. They provide information regarding the rules and regulations of the park, the flora and fauna in the area, the nearest place to camp, lodging, dining, and where to purchase a map. This makes them an excellent community resource.

Volunteer Service Agreement: This agreement between the FFLA NYS Chapter and the NYSDEC allows us to do what we do. The current agreement is in place from 9-20-2022 to 9-18-2027. Our mission is to: “aid in the preservation, maintenance, and enhancement of state owned natural resources at minimum cost to the state.” Our activities are: “restoration, maintenance, creation of interpretive exhibits and staffing of the tower.” See attached.

Nearby Trails

Good Luck Cliffs Trail extends 3.9 miles from NY Route 10 to Good Luck Cliffs. This trail has an access point at the highway parking area and utilizes 2.9 miles of snowmobile trails to reach the junction of the cliffs trail. The trail is marked with blue "foot trail" discs, but few markers are placed on the final steep climb and the path to the open ledge area with views.

Jockeybush Lake Trail extends 1.2 miles from NY Route 10 to Jockeybush Lake. The trail passes a series of small waterfalls and provides several scenic views. It is marked with blue "foot trail" discs.

Panther Mountain/Echo Cliff Trail extends 0.8 miles from County Route 24 to Echo Cliffs. It is a popular short climb that yields excellent views. The trail is marked with blue "foot trail" discs.

Fulton Five Hiking Challenge: This challenge includes a hike to Kane Mt Fire Tower and the following 4 hikes:

Nine Corner Lake: A gradual uphill climb passing several mountain streams. Nine Corner lake has crystal-clear water with several large rock outcroppings along the shore. The trail continues along the south side of the lake, enabling a longer hike if desired. 1.8 mi round trip.

Stewart and Indian Lake- The trail is mostly flat, passing by Stewart Lake (1.4 miles) and then on to Indian Lake. 4.4 miles round trip. Begins at Kane Mt Fire Tower trailhead parking.

Willie Wildlife Marsh- Explore a wetland habitat with a viewing platform and boardwalks that traverse the marsh and open areas. 1.5 mile loop hike

Mud Lake- Mud Lake is a nice trail to enjoy the scenery of the Adirondack Park. Part of Northville/Lake Placid trail. 3.9 miles round trip.

4-2023ljr

Information for this handbook was compiled with assistance from Retired NYS Forest Ranger Paul Hartmann, Author Marty Podskoch, PBS.org, Past FFLA Director Bill Starr, Observer Rick Miller, and Smokey Bear.