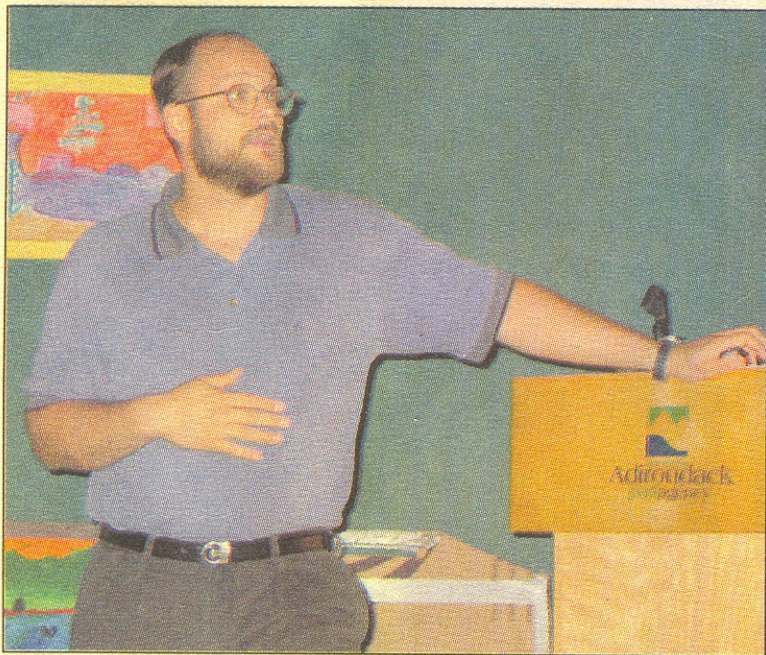


Residents gather to save fire tower



WORKING TO SAVE A LANDMARK — David Petrelli, of Malone, gives a presentation on saving the St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower Wednesday evening at the Paul Smiths Visitor Interpretive Center.

(Enterprise photo — Laurie Besanceney)

**By LAURIE BESANCENEY
Enterprise Staff Writer**

PAUL SMITHS — Area residents gathered Wednesday for a lecture at the Paul Smiths Visitor Interpretive Center to learn about the St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower and what is being done to save it.

"It's so nice to see those structures that were so historically significant," said Martin Podskoch, who made a presentation and is currently writing a book about the fire towers of Essex, Franklin, Clinton and St. Lawrence counties.

Those who attended the presentation learned that the tower is slated to be taken down because, according to the State Land Use Master Plan, it is in a canoe area, and therefore non-conforming because it is a work of man.

David Petrelli, of a group dedicated to saving the structure called Saving St. Regis Tower,

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argued, however, that the tower is historic and if taken down the views from the cab of the tower could be lost forever.

"I'm very confident that if the label (non-conforming) is removed from it, then it can be safely restored," Petrelli said.

Thus far, a petition with more than 600 signatures is being circulated to change the area's label. An initial group has met already and it has the support of Adirondack Architectural Heritage. An interior department historic nomination has been completed and the group is now working on obtaining New York State Department of Environmental Conservation support and continuing to reach out for support for action to change the tower's current status and fate. Support for the tower has also come in the form of resolutions from the towns of Brighton and Santa Clara. In addition, the Rainbow Lake Association is in support of the tower.

At one time, there was more than 100 fire towers in New York state but today many of them have been removed, Petrelli said.

Podskoch said that a fire started by Verplanck Colvin and his surveying team in 1876 on top of St. Regis Mountain became out of control, destroying most of the summit and leaving it bare. Later, William Rockefeller tried to get a fire tower on top of the mountain because of his concern of fire. A telephone line was set up in

order for the observer to call the forest ranger at the beginning stages of a fire. In 1911, this three mile telephone line to the summit, made of bare wire pegged into trees, cost \$294.70. Part of the observers job was maintaining the line. The first observer reported 55 fires. In 1918, a 35 foot fire tower was constructed in order to get better views of the surrounding land and in 1925 the first cabin was built.

Petrelli added that the St. Regis fire tower was one of the last manned fire towers with its last year of active service being 1990.

Today, because it is not being manned, the tower is

falling into disrepair and could be a liability to the state, according to Petrelli.

"For St. Regis Mountain, I don't recommend climbing it," Petrelli said. "It's not the safest thing to do. The bottom two sets of stairs have been removed."

He added though that it is remarkably stable, despite the lightning strikes, freeze and thaws of the seasons and wind the tower faces.

"They're very incredible structures," Petrelli said about fire towers.

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