

Fire tower restoration hindered again

November 27, 2013

By Bill Starr , Forest Fire Lookout Association

[Save](#) |

In response to Chris Knight's article, "Cost of fire tower restoration questioned," on Nov. 19, I can't honestly believe this topic is being discussed, but in hindsight I guess I can.

One only needs to spend a few minutes and search this newspaper's archives to discover that funding to restore the Hurricane Mountain and St. Regis Mountain fire towers had been talked about several times during the public comment meetings, in this newspaper and at the Adirondack Park Agency's public comment meetings a few years ago.

People over in Elizabethtown had established a fund specifically devoted to the restoration of the Hurricane Mountain fire tower, and the last I knew (about 2009), this bank account's balance was in the \$10,000 range. A group to restore the St. Regis Mountain fire tower formed several years ago, and they had applied to the Department of Environmental Conservation around 2009 for permission to begin restoration work on that fire tower. In the time this group has been in existence it has lined up several sources of revenue to help pay the cost of restoration.

Article Photos



The fire tower atop Hurricane Mountain

(Enterprise file photo — Mike Lynch)

Yet it's no secret that the prominent environmental groups in the Adirondacks have been against saving these two fire towers. All along they've been pushing for the state to remove them as they are non-compliant with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan. It is also no secret that within the bureaucracy of the APA, upper management at the DEC, the Legislature and in the governor's office, these environmental groups have friends who help guide their beliefs and concerns to key people within the state government, and because of this I am not surprised that the cost of funding has now come up again.

However, time, as always, is on the side of the environmentalists. It has been three or four years since the topic of saving the fire towers on Hurricane and St. Regis mountains has been headline news. As such, much of what was discussed has been forgotten about by the people, and moreover, several seats on the APA's board are now occupied with new faces.

So the environmentalists are concerned over Hurricane and St. Regis, yet when a plan for other land parcels has come up that needed special considerations, these same environmental groups had absolutely no concerns in manipulating the SLMP in ways to make their desires a reality; the unit management plans for Lows Lake is just one example of this. Yet they're still fighting the amendments to the SLMP that make it possible to save these two fire towers. Why? The answer is simple: They want the fire towers to be gone.

I really have to laugh at the state when concerns of spending a mere \$15,000 to restore a fire tower come up. When has the state shown any concern in spending millions of dollars to buy more land that it doesn't really need to own? Or when has the state shown any concern in paying well above the market value for land when The Nature Conservancy buys and holds land until the state can come up with the funds to buy it from them? Again, the answer is simple when a handful of special-interest groups, who represent a vast minority of New York citizens, want it.

Tax dollars have been grossly wasted in the Adirondacks for years to keep these environmental groups happy, but when common, everyday people stand up and tell their government they want something to happen, it falls under attack. Who exactly are state officials and bureaucrats representing? The people who pay their salaries or a handful of special-interest groups who only represent less than 1 percent of the state's population?

Bill Starr lives in Schenectady and is state director of the Forest Fire Lookout Association.