

2019 Fall Summary

October 1, 2019

Dear Fire Tower Supporter

This year has been extremely productive for the fire tower on St. Regis Mountain. Two important restoration projects were completed. All new cross braces were installed in May and in August the concrete footings that support the tower were repaired. The brace replacement and footing repairs were major projects necessary to ensure the longevity of the tower. The restoration started in 2015 with the re-installation of the first two flights of stairs, the replacement of the lumber on all the stairs, landings and cab; and the repair of the railings and safety fencing. In 2016 we installed a new roof and added safety features such as window brackets and a hatch rail in the cab. That work enabled us to open the tower to climbing for the first time in twenty six years.

Now we are transitioning to projects and maintenance that will continue to keep the tower in good condition, so that it remains opened and safe for generations to come. This work is important and will be ongoing, but the major concerns for the tower's future are now alleviated. The restoration has been a true community effort and we are grateful for all the support provided to reach this point.

We continue to fulfill the educational component of our mission by providing tower stewards and materials that foster a greater appreciation of the fire tower and the Forest Preserve. We also participated in the statewide lighting of the towers and the Forest Fire Lookout Association's Northeastern Conference. Both of these events provided people with a greater awareness of the valuable role of the NYS fire tower network.

This year we added two new board members to the FOSRMFT. We welcome Bob Brand and Nancy LaBombard. Bob has jumped right in and taken a leadership role in a vital restoration project and Nancy has taken over the role of Treasurer. Scottie Adams has stepped down as the Secretary/Treasurer, a role that she has filled for over five years. Scottie was instrumental in the establishment of our group and in obtaining our non-profit status. She will continue to serve as a board member at large. In the meantime we are searching for someone to take on the secretary role.

the meantime we are searching for someone to take on the secretary role. We are in the fifth year of our partnership with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to restore, maintain, and educate the public about the fire tower. The DEC has been there every step of the way; providing materials and logistical support, obtaining project approvals, offering technical advice, and reimbursing the Adirondack Watershed Institute for summit stewards. The support of the DEC has been instrumental in the fulfillment of our mission. In January 2020 our Volunteer Stewardship Agreement (VSA) with the DEC will be renewed. We look forward to the next five years of this partnership.

We appreciate everyone that is receiving this newsletter. Your support and interest in the St. Regis fire tower form the backbone of our efforts. We welcome your contributions and efforts and look forward to your continued support. Thank you.

Restoration

Installation cross braces

In early May the installation of twenty-four new cross braces was completed. Planning for the project began late in 2016 and it took two and one half years to accomplish the task. Through donations and grants the Friends supplied the majority of the funding for the fabrication and installation of the new braces. The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation along with the NY State Police Aviation Unit transported the new materials and tools to the summit late last fall. When the project was finished this spring they removed the old braces and the tools. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the expertise and assistance from many NYS employees. Special thanks go out to Forester, Steve Guglielmi; Forest Ranger, Kevin Burns; Forest Ranger, Jeff Balerno and the State Police pilots and ground crew.

The braces were fabricated by master craftsman Pat Lawrence of Pat's Welding in Ausable Forks. Contractor Mike Vilegi installed the braces. He and his crew worked under challenging conditions to complete the project. We were extremely fortunate to have this dedicated crew, their tenacity and commitment cannot be overstated.

Numerous volunteers also climbed the mountain in difficult conditions to lend a hand in the work. Funding for the project came from a generous anonymous donor, many small donations and a grant from the Cloudsplitter Foundation. The DEC purchased the raw steel and paid to have the braces galvanized after fabrication.

From start to finish this project took the work and collaboration of a great

number of people. At times the task was overwhelming, but the outcome is wonderful and will ensure that the tower remains standing for decades to come. Thanks to all that played a role.

Repair of tower footings

In late July the Friends engaged Michael Stender of Stender Masonry in Saranac Lake to inspect the footings and pins of the tower. After the inspection it was determined that the pins were in good condition and that the footings could be repaired with an additional day of work. We contracted with Stender Masonry to do the work. On August 19th six volunteers met Michael early in the morning to hike up the mountain and carry the tools and materials needed to complete the project. Water for the masonry work was obtained about halfway up the trail from the perennial stream that crosses near the site of the old observer's cabin. Despite being drenched by a fast moving microburst while on the summit, repair of the footings was completed.

Priming and Painting

Two priming projects need to be done before we can paint the entire tower. Currently board members Bob Brand and Rich LaBombard are removing the pressure treated (PT) lumber piece by piece to apply a paint or sheet barrier between the galvanized steel and the lumber. Studies have shown that due to the formulation of currently manufactured PT lumber a chemical reaction can occur resulting in corrosion of the steel. The barrier will prevent this from happening. The work is tedious. Bob, Rich and other volunteers have made three visits to the tower; all the stair treads and one of the landings have been treated. The work continues with the hope that it will be complete before winter.

The other priming project involves cold spray galvanizing the places on the tower that have breaks in the original surface, such as holes drilled after original construction. Next summer we plan to paint the tower from top to bottom. Some parts have not been painted in over thirty years. Painting is not only done for aesthetic purpose, but also to prevent corrosion due to weathering. We are fortunate that very little graffiti occurs on the tower. To continue to discourage it we will supply volunteers with a small container of paint and brushes to regularly touch up any graffiti that is encountered.

Fencing repair

The fencing installed four years ago needs some repair and reshaping. This will be done as the opportunities present themselves, with the goal being to eventually install improved fencing and railing protection.

Leg Mounting Brackets

While completing the footing repair it was noticed that the leg brackets are clogged with debris that has likely been accumulating for thirty years or more. This has resulted in the brackets holding water that may damage the footings and pins. We plan to clean these out and try to reestablish drainage to alleviate the problem.

Events

Sixth Annual Lighting of NYS Fire Towers

For the third year we have participated in this event. This year a record number of twenty towers throughout the state lit up the night on Saturday of Labor Day Weekend. It was a clear starry night across the state and the event was a huge success. Board members Janelle Hoh, David Petrelli and Bob Brand hiked to the summit of St. Regis with numerous light sources. From nearby vantage points it appeared that rays of light were radiating from the cab. In conjunction with the lighting, our friends at Lake Clear Lodge hosted a special dinner for people to enjoy the event from their beautiful lake front property. The dinner was sold out. Board members Scottie Adams and Ed Hixson were on hand to represent the Friends group.

Forest Fire Lookout Association Conference

In June, board members and friends attended the FFLA NE Conference in the Catskills. Doug Fitzgerald gave a presentation about the installation of the new braces on St. Regis, it was well received. The conference was a good opportunity to network with other fire tower groups and to exchange information.

Education

Tower Stewards

Our stewards, provided through Paul Smith's College (PSC) Adirondack Watershed Institute (AWI) and volunteers had another productive summer on the summit. With a total of 13 days covered, stewards reached 744 hikers. This total does not include the many hikers who interacted with volunteer work crews and FOSRMFT members hiking the trail. Education and outreach are vital to the success of the tower and FOSRMFT. In coming years, we hope to have more consistent steward coverage in order to inform inquisitive hikers on the cultural and natural history of St. Regis Mountain and the tower. Volunteer stewards are always welcomed to sign up on our web site at <http://www.friendsofstregis.org/calendar/>

Panoramic Panels

Plans for placing photo panels of the south and east views in the tower are moving forward. The photos have been labeled and checked, dimensions

have been determined and mounting brackets are in conceptual design. The panels will be constructed over the winter and installed early next year.

Volunteers

The easiest way to volunteer is to sign up as a tower steward. In addition to that there are opportunities to be part of the restoration effort. Most projects for this season will wrap out for the season by the end of October. Next year there will be more chances to get your hands dirty. If you are out for a hike and want to help for the day, touch up paint and brushes are available to paint over any new graffiti.

If you are interested in being part of the team that oversees and coordinates the friends group we would like to hear from you. Currently we are looking to expand the board. Board members at large are welcome and we have openings for secretary, volunteer coordinator and events manager. Sign up on our website and we'll let you know when we have tasks that will fit your talents. <http://www.friendsofstregis.org/volunteer-form/>

Donations

Your donation will enable us to complete the final restoration projects and maintain the tower in the coming years. The education and interpretive phase of our mission is ongoing and expanding. The potential to reach so many people is unlimited. We look forward to developing and conducting educational and interpretive programs that promotes the historic and cultural values of the St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower, the NYS Fire Tower Network and the Adirondack Preserve. Contributions are always welcome. See our website for gifts that are available for various levels of giving.

<http://www.friendsofstregis.org/Donate-2/> The Friends of St. Regis Mt. Fire Tower is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, contributions are tax deductible.

From the Friends of St. Regis Mountain Fire Tower Board of Directors

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You are on this list because you have expressed an interest in the restoration of the Fire Tower on St. Regis Mountain

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