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LOOKOUT NETWORK

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FOREST FIRE LOOKOUT ASSOCIATION, INC.

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FFLA Policy on Lookout Disposition Needed

The recent request for comments on the proposed relocation of Baltic Peak Lookout (Eldorado NF, CA) brought out the need for an "official" FFLA policy concerning the disposition of fire lookout structures.

Article Five, Section Four of the FFLA Constitution states, "This Corporation and/or its affiliated Chapters will serve no lobby concerning employment of lookout personnel or the retention of in-service fixed detection lookout sites." But, nowhere in either the constitution or the bylaws is the disposition of lookout structures addressed.

It would probably be safe to say that everybody in the FFLA is happy when a lookout can be restored on site, and no one in the FFLA is happy if total destruction occurs. But what about the other situations? For the FFLA to better be able to participate in discussions concerning the disposition of fire lookout structures, an official FFLA policy is needed.

Some have proposed preferences of 1) Save in place, 2) Move to SUITABLE public site, preferably entire structure, 3) Sell to private bidder, and 4) Salvage for re-use on other lookout projects. Added to this is the idea that, "Simple destruction is NOT an option!". Significant analysis should be done and all realistic possibilities exhausted for saving in place before moving beyond the first option."

Others have concerns with moving lookouts anywhere and the mindset which seems to be that a lookout at a museum or a fairgrounds is just as good as in its natural setting. They feel that it just isn't, especially when only part of the tower (if any) is even re-erected. Often it is just the cab on a new base of some sort. And, usually, there is no scenery. One of the few exceptions to that is Rod Fosback's Monumental Lookout (see Autumn 2003 issue). The "SUITABLE" caveat in the above paragraph may address this concern to some degree, although getting agreement on what is or isn't suitable may be a challenge, just considering the differences in terrain of sites across the country. A relocated tower at a fairgrounds in Minnesota's relatively flat terrain is not the same as a relocated tower on the valley floor in a mountainous region of the west.

Another argument against moving lookouts to fairgrounds and similar sites is the ease in getting rid of them later with little or no public awareness. Mark Thornton reported that the old Fowler Peak (CA) lookout suffered that fate. About 20 years ago, the CDF decided to replace the Fowler Peak Lookout in Calaveras County. The lookout had been erected by the CCC, so CCC alumni proposed relocating the old wooden structure to make way for the new steel lookout. The lookout was carefully dismantled and trucked from the Fowler Peak site to the Calaveras County Fairgrounds (where the famous frog jumping contest is held each spring). After much fanfare and formal dedication of

the relocated lookout, people sort of lost interest. This year, some twenty years later, the fair manager decided to get rid of the "old building." The Fowler Peak relocated fire lookout was scrapped by inmate crews this past February.

There are also concerns with the "salvage" idea, in the fear that the "need" for parts elsewhere or the salvage value may be used to justify the removal of a lookout.

Chairman Keith Argow has asked Western Deputy Dave Bula to draft an official FFLA position, to be discussed and then acted on at this year's meetings. Please provide input to your chapter director.

Baltic Lookout Removal Proposed

The Forest Service is proposing to decommission the Baltic Lookout and associated structures. Baltic Peak is near the western edge of the Placerville Ranger District of the Eldorado NF, in El Dorado County. In addition to the lookout tower, there is a residence cabin, garage, water tower and pump house. All of these structures would be removed, leaving in place the foundations, roadway and other remnants of the site.

The tower would be relocated to the El Dorado County Fairgrounds in Placerville. The other structures would be demolished since they have been badly vandalized and are not worth the cost of moving or reconstructing them. The State Historic Preservation Officer has concurred that Baltic Lookout is no longer eligible for the National Register of Historic Places due to the advanced state of deterioration.

The lookout tower and residence cabin were erected in 1931. The tower is an 80' Pacific Coast Steel tower with 7'x7' metal cab. Similar to a LS-40 Aermotor tower, it is made of a lighter steel. The garage, water tower and pump house were built shortly thereafter. Use of the site was discontinued in the late 1990s for two reasons: continuous ongoing vandalism of the facility was occurring, and the site could not be secured or maintained; and the need for the lookout decreased as the front country became more heavily populated and the use of cell phones increased.



(See page 4 for related discussion on disposition of historic structures owned by the US Forest Service.)