

# Northwest Montana Lookout Association



## New Board Members



**Morgan Ray**

Morgan moved up to the Flathead Valley ten years ago, as part of the AmeriCorps VISTA program, and never looked back. With degrees in behavior analysis and

library science, she works at Flathead Valley Community College as the Director of Library Services. In the spirit of lifelong learning and adventure, she gathers hobbies like it's going out of style. A novice gardener and stained-glass worker, she spends the summer months visiting lookouts, floating our rivers, and relaxing in a hammock with a book in her hand. She's excited to hit the ground running with NMLA and to talk lookout preservation with those who love them best.

## Notes from the Board

I am delighted to report that this was our 10th season of projects restoring lookouts in northwest Montana! Looking back, I am so proud of the work that our Board and countless volunteers have put in over the last decade to help our partner Agencies keep lookouts a vital part of fire-fighting and recreational use on the landscape. This year's projects contributed more than 1600 hours and an in-kind value of over \$69,000 to our partner Agencies. We thank you for your continuing support and look forward to working with you on a mountain top in our second decade.

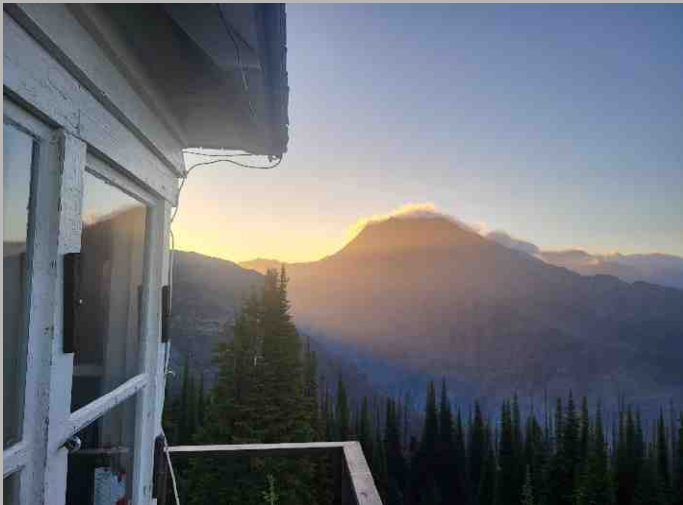
*Chuck Manning*  
Board Chair





**Joe Schmidt**

Joe is married with two grown children and his family has been visiting the Flathead valley and surrounding areas for a couple of decades. With the kids moving on with their lives, and Joe reaching retirement age, Joe and Joann decided they wanted to live full time in Northwest Montana to follow their passion of outdoor adventure. Since moving to the valley, they keep themselves busy with hiking, biking, backpacking, rafting, downhill and nordic skiing. They also have a passion for giving back to the community and are active in a number of organizations supporting the natural wonders of the area. Joe was drawn to the Northwest Montana Lookout Association due to its focus on preservation of historical structures. The opportunity to apply his handyman skill in the restoration and maintenance of lookouts, the ability to experience the remoteness and vastness from the locations of historical structures and the gratification of accomplishment after a structure has been restored to its original glory are just a few examples of what he receives through volunteering his skills and knowledge to this worthy cause. Joe is the new NWMLA Treasurer.



Our thanks to departing Board Member Kyle Stetler for his many contributions during his time on the Board. We wish him well in his future endeavors.

**ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL WILDERNESS SPEAKER SERIES**

The NMLA is a co-sponsor of this annual 3 month winter speaker series which always attracts some dynamic presentations about wilderness for an enthusiastic audience.

If you missed them, recordings are well worth viewing at [EVENTS | nwmt-ffla](#)



## REFLECTING ON 10 YEARS RESTORING LOOKOUTS



When Chuck Manning spent a summer staffing Thoma Lookout fresh out of high school, Nancy would hike up to visit him. They never imagined that their lives would still be intertwined with lookouts 60 years later. After that summer, they went on to get married, have a family, and have busy lives and careers.

In 2013 they found themselves volunteering with the Forest Service, once again on a mountain top staffing a lookout tower at Firefighter and Baptiste. Visiting with other volunteer lookouts, they saw an opportunity to help out with various lookout maintenance projects that it was often difficult for the Forest Service to complete, and a group began exploring the idea of forming a non-profit organization. After discussion and support from The Hungry Horse/Glacier View/Spotted Bear Rangers and Fire Staff, the Northwest Montana Chapter of the Forest Fire Lookout Association was established under the umbrella of the Idaho/Montana chapter of the National Lookout Association. Later, in 2020, we became a stand alone 501c(3) non-profit, the Northwest Montana Lookout Association.

The first efforts the group undertook in 2013 were finding volunteers for the restoration of the Holland Peak Cabin and providing materials for the FS restoration of the Coal Ridge patrol cabin re-siding project.

In 2014, the first Memorandum of Understanding was written with the Flathead National Forest, followed in 2015 with the Kootenai National Forest and Glacier National Park. The NMLA began doing assessments of lookouts that were not in use to help determine maintenance needs and set the stage for future project partnerships.

For the early projects, volunteers were recruited by word of mouth and through friends. Now a more formal process is in place, as there are always more interested volunteers than space available every summer.

One of the more challenging projects Chuck recalls was Wam, where we had to remove the windows and take them off-site for restoration, rebuild the foundation, shutters, walls, siding, rebuild new window sills, and eventually reinstall the reglazed and painted windows. The project began in 2018 and was completed this past year with moving the outhouse to a new location.

Though every lookout hike is special, Nancy's favorite is probably Mount Brown. They've made the hike many times, and each time it's still wonderful—such a beautiful spot, and the hike always feels like a real accomplishment. Another favorite is Baptiste lookout. One year at the end of their volunteer season, they woke up to 42 degrees inside the lookout and 22 degrees outside - that was the end of season! Chuck fondly recalls early season assessment trips with Nancy to Jumbo and a trip to Mud Lake where Sydney treed a bear (twice!) and they ran short of both human and dog food and had to restock at Black Bear cabin for the hike out.



Nancy and Chuck had the opportunity to revisit their time at Thoma lookout when they filled in for a week for lookout Lief Haugan 50 years after Chuck's first summer spent there. They found some familiar signs of his first visit - bear scratches on the door, spikes in a tree used to climb for a better view, and signs of an old refrigerator hole Chuck created when he staffed the lookout. And the view was just as wonderful as they remembered

When asked about lessons learned over the 10 years of projects, Chuck said that of course "planning is crucial". We all know he's the master of that! Second he said that it's all about building and tending the many relationships - with the Agencies, our Partners, and our many members and volunteers that are the real keys to NMLA's success and sustainability. "And let's not forget well fed volunteers", Nancy chimed in

Reflecting on why they are still passionate about lookouts after all the trips and hours they have spent, Chuck and Nancy agreed that they love the solitude and the chance to see the cycles of nature up close and unfiltered - the storms, the sunsets and sunrises, the animals... It all adds to a fulfilling life. And Chuck still has some lookouts on his bucket list. When he can find the time he would like to visit Heaven's Peak lookout.



Thoma Lookout, 1963



Thoma door Bear marks 2013

## ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

Thorough assessments of lookout conditions are a critical first step in planning for every lookout maintenance or restoration project. NMLA's goal is to repeat assessments on a regular basis to help monitor lookout status, complete minor maintenance and identify any changing conditions that might merit emergency repairs. In mid June, this group of members gathered at Cooney Lookout on the Swan Lake Ranger District to train as Team Leaders on future assessments. Thank you to everyone for stepping up!





# 2023 Projects in Review

Mount Wam LO  
Kootenai National Forest

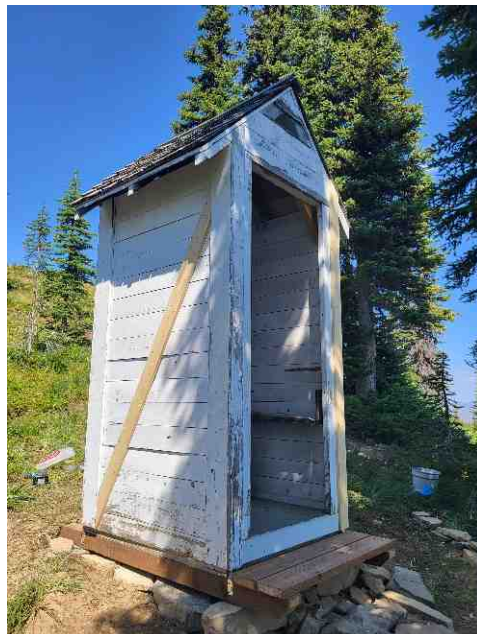
2018



2023

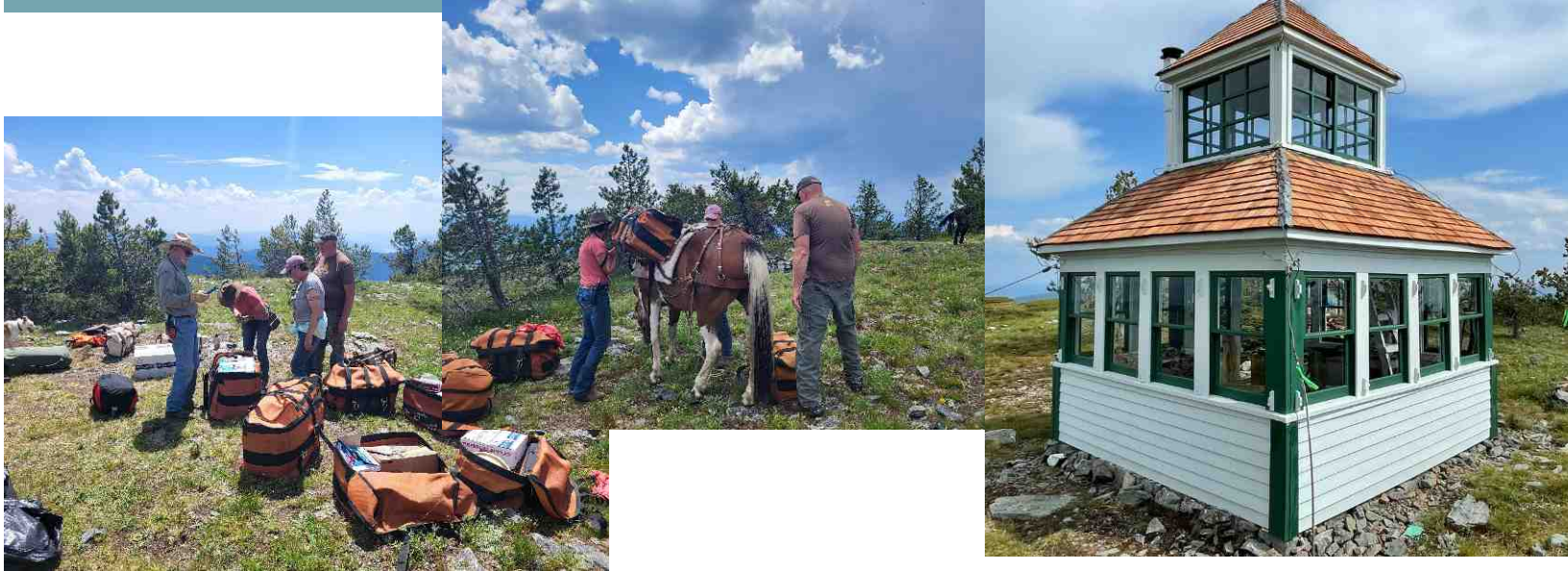


Mount Wam Lookout is located within the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area near the town of Eureka, MT within a few miles of the US-Canada border. Those of you who have been following our restoration projects, know that we have had ongoing work at Mount Wam for quite a few years. We are now reaching the end of our projects at Mount Wam, and the lookout is looking remarkable! Final touches this year included painting the interior windows and exterior trim and moving the outhouse to a new location. As the lookout is on an outcrop of sedimentary rock, this was no small undertaking – a generator powered demolition hammer was used to break up the layers, and a pit close to five feet was dug in about two and a half days. Next a vault was built to line the hole and then the crew moved the outhouse to its new location. Thanks to volunteers Barb Hvizdak, Greg Evans, Duane Day, and Chuck Manning for getting the job done! The Northwest Montana Back Country Horsemen supported both ends of the project to help transport tools and supplies. The YCC joined the project for one day to pull staples as the lookout was covered with Aluminized Structure Wrap for protection during the 2022 Weasel Fire.





## McGuire LO Kootenai National Forest



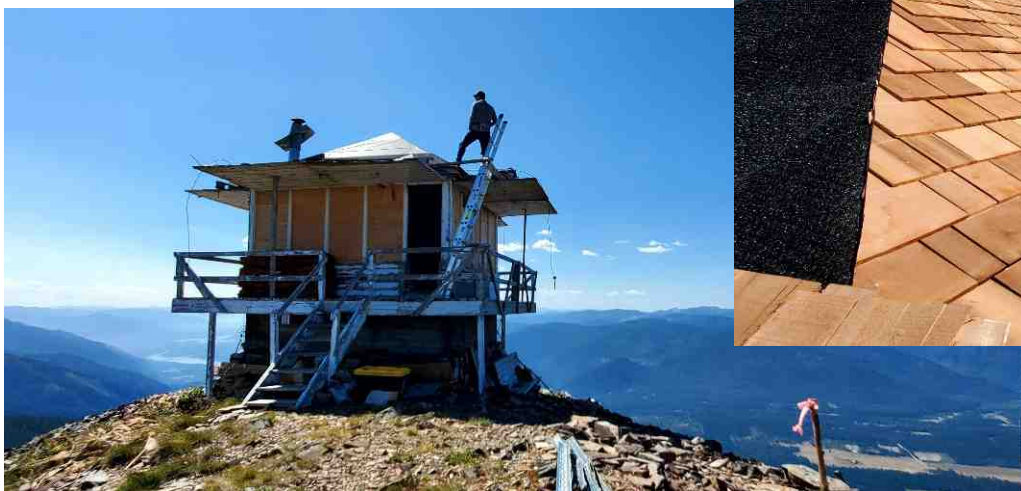
The McGuire Mountain Lookout and support structures restoration project is finally completed. Starting in 2016 when our first on-site condition assessment took place, this endeavor evolved into a major rehab project consisting of leveling the lookout; removing, reconditioning, and replacing all windows; building new shutters; moving the outhouse onto a newly constructed vault; reroofing the lookout and both support structures. This year's portion could not have happened without the tremendous support of our volunteer force which included Barb Hvizdak, Cathy Calloway, Lindsay Davis, Mark Miller, Chris Holdhusen, Mark Gunther, Rick Davis, and Chuck Manning. Also, joining us this year for a one-night cultural shock campout, we welcomed Andrés Barboza who lives in Madrid Spain and is a friend of Lindsay Davis.

Leif Haugen from the Flathead National Forest and his volunteer crew of four- Kyle Johnson, Dennis Divoky, Terry Divoky, and John Opatz, tackled the reroof of the L4 cupola designed lookout which required fall protection certification. This year the NorthWest Montana Back Country Horsemen supported both ends of the project to help transport tools and supplies not airlifted in by helicopter in early June by the Kootenai National Forest Helitack Crew. The Youth Conservation Corp also helped sherpa supplies to and from the lookout again this summer, thank you YCC!





## Star Peak LO Kootenai National Forest



Star Peak Lookout, located in the Scotchman Peaks Recommended Wilderness Area, is the site of the first recorded lookout in Montana. The original rock house, built in 1910, still sits below the current lookout. This historic lookout restoration is supported through the Great American Outdoors Act, passed in 2020, which provides funding to improve infrastructure and expand recreation opportunities in national parks and other public lands. The Star Peak Lookout project began in early June when all windows were removed and flown off the mountain, thanks to the Kootenai National Forest Helitack Crew. The windows will be reconditioned over the winter and flown back up the mountain to be reinstalled next spring. NMLA volunteers Bob Lambrecht, Seth Lambrecht, Justin Maisch, and Mark Miller were this summer's crew. This crew reroofed the structure with new cedar shingles, scraped and painted the exterior with the exception of the deteriorated shutters and addressed any failing structural issues. Shutter material was painted this year in preparation for building new shutters in 2024 to be installed over the reconditioned and reinstalled windows. Jeff Grotjohn, of the Cabinet Back Country Horsemen, supported this project by transporting tools and supplies not airlifted in by helicopter in early June along with Cabinet Ranger District personnel.





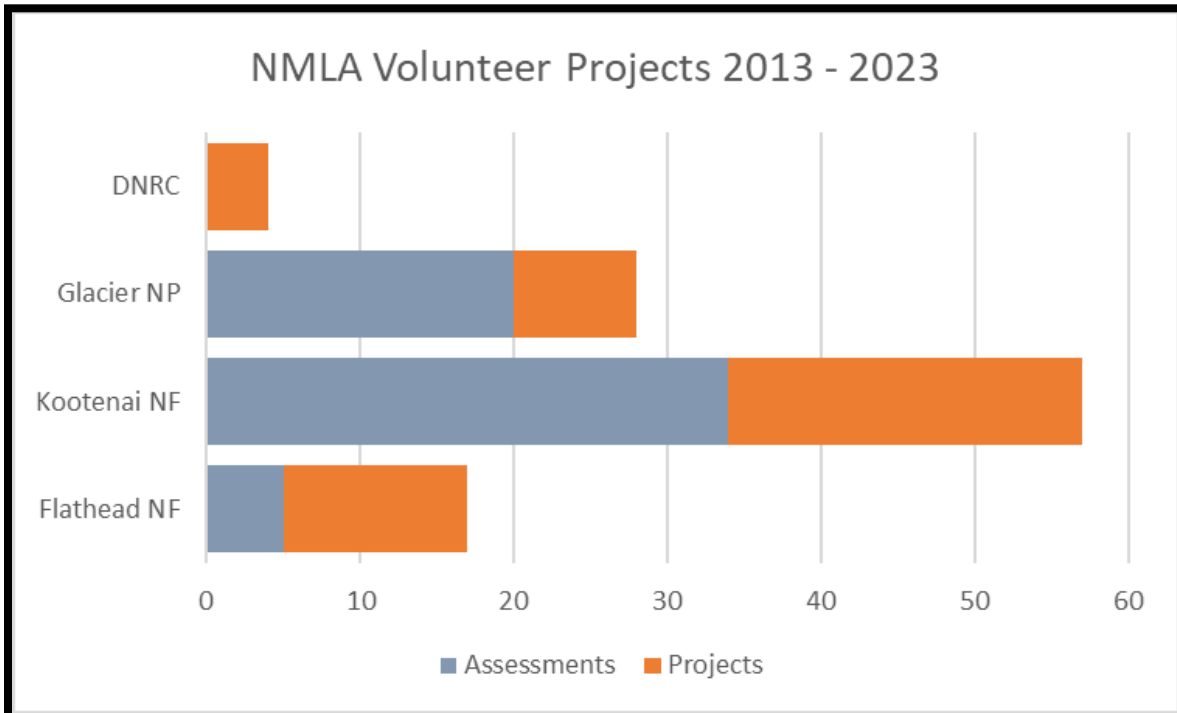
## Big Creek Baldy LO Kootenai National Forest

Big Creek Baldy, north of Libby, got a new roof last year. This year NMLA worked with the Forest Service to get a new heater installed to upgrade the cabin rental experience. Our volunteers also did some fine-tuning of the roof and hatch. Final measurements and materials were gathered for the next stage of work. Some planned work had to be deferred to next year. Thank you Salena Beckwith for this lovely photo.



## LOOKING BACK

This year we surpassed our 100th volunteer outing between assessments and larger maintenance/restoration projects. While our restoration partnerships began on the Flathead National Forest, the graph below shows that over time more of our work has shifted to the Kootenai National Forest where Challenge-Cost Share funds are often available to help fund needed restoration work.





# Mount Brown LO Glacier National Park



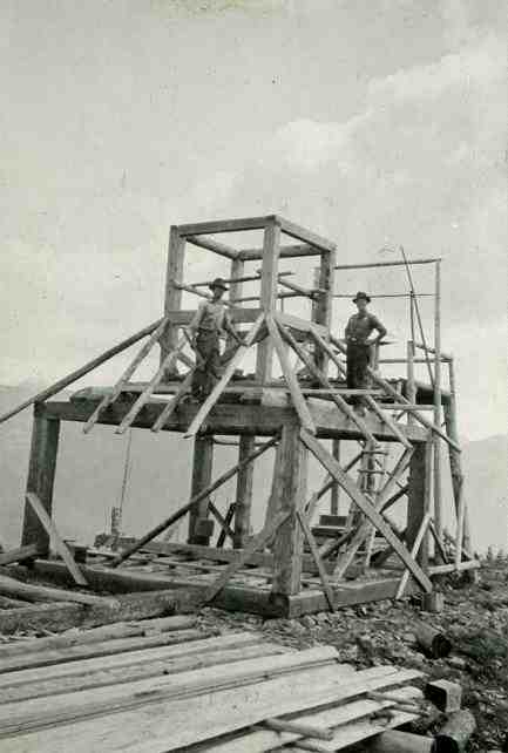
Overlooking Lake McDonald in Glacier National Park (GNP) sits Mount Brown Lookout just south of its namesake peak. This summer marks the completion of several ongoing maintenance projects which included replacing cracked windows, replacing failed siding boards on the lower enclosed storage area, replacing failing catwalk deck boards, and painting needed areas of the lookout's interior and exterior. Bob Cowdrick and Mike Barham were instrumental in bringing closure to this project with the help of Chuck Manning. GNP personnel were instrumental in supporting this project and coordinated pack stock to transport all materials and supplies. Volunteer support was funded in part through a Whitefish Community Foundation grant.





# Firefighter Lookout Celebrates 70 Years

In 1923, the U.S. Forest Service constructed the original Firefighter Lookout in the South Fork of the Flathead River, a standard D-6 design used between 1916 and 1929, containing a 12 x 12 cabin and a cupola. The lookout sat on the ground on top of the southeast ridge of Firefighter Mountain.



Firefighter lookout construction, 1923.  
U.S. Forest Service photo.

The lookout became one of over 650 fire lookouts in Montana built to help the fledgling U.S. Forest Service detect fires after the Great Fire of 1910 burned 3 million acres largely in northern Idaho and western Montana.

Historical information does not appear to exist about the use of the lookout and the role it may have played throughout the years. Firefighter stood watch while the Hungry Horse Dam changed the South Fork landscape. But a brush fire got out of control during the clearing operation and destroyed the lookout sometime between 1948 and 1952, before the opening of the dam in July 1953. Relic artifacts such as broken glass, charred wood, and the remains of a cookstove and stovepipe remain, as well as red argillite rocks from parts of the foundation.



Stove and stovepipe parts



Foundation rocks. Tree grew in middle of foundation.

The Bureau of Reclamation built the present 41-foot Firefighter Lookout tower and the access road to replace Riverside Lookout, about two miles south of the first Firefighter Lookout. Riverside was lost to the reservoir.

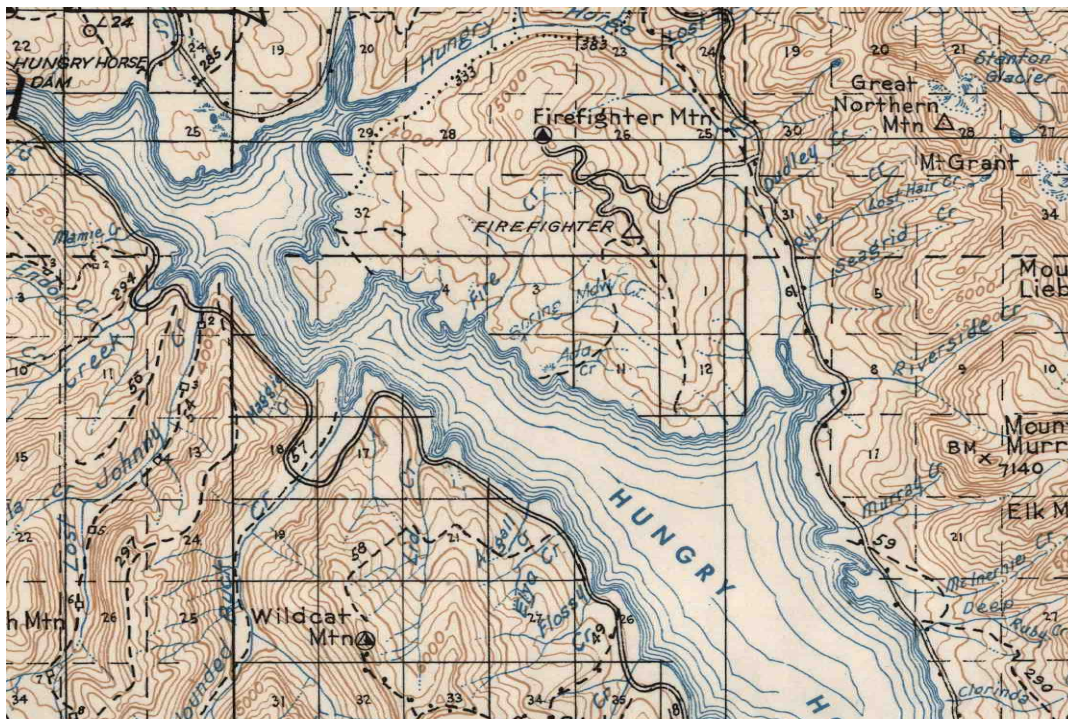
Firefighter Mountain contains two distinct knolls, and the northern knoll was the chosen site to construct the new lookout. The map (top of next page) shows both sites as well as two trails that head south. It is possible that the easternmost trail connected with Riverside Lookout, which would have been almost directly below it.

Firefighter lookout is a favorite among lookout aficionados, according to Leif Haugen, who heads the lookout program for the Flathead National Forest and Glacier National Park. People appreciate its accessibility and expansive views. The 1953 (current) lookout is unique in design, Leif says. Firefighter is the only lookout with an R-6 flattop base and an L-4 tower on top of it. Originally it contained a hip roof, which was later replaced by a flat roof.

The current lookout was staffed with paid Forest Service personnel until sometime around 1997 or 1998, when Leif said it went out of service. It remained that way until the Flathead National Forest fire organization began to see merit in putting some lookouts back on the rolls after 2010. Baptiste Lookout, south of Firefighter, had some major renovations done to it before it could be considered usable. At the same time,



Firefighter gained support for rehab work, taking far less effort than Baptiste. The decking and railings were tuned up and the roof made safe and sound.



This 1951 topographic map shows Firefighter in its current location, 1-1/2 miles northwest of the first lookout, although it was only contracted in 1951. Construction began in 1952 and was completed in 1953. This map also shows the original lookout as a triangulation point only.

The completion of the projects on Baptiste and Firefighter allowed them to be the first of three lookouts (including Cyclone Lookout) to enter into the Flathead's volunteer lookout program in 2012. Forest Service budgets could not afford to pay a staffed employee, but there was no shortage of people interested in volunteering for the job. The first couple of years during the program, work continued to improve Firefighter and Baptiste. Subsequent years have seen projects being completed by the volunteer lookouts or through projects funded through cooperative efforts between the U.S. Forest Service and the Northwest Montana Lookout Association. As an example, in 2018, NWLA teamed up with the Daybreak Rotary Club of Kalispell for a major painting project for Firefighter. Today both Baptiste and Firefighter have received important upgrades to carry them forward into the future.

In 1967, Charlie Shaw wrote in *The Flathead Story*, "At the present time, the Flathead maintains only 21 lookouts. Their primary function is to record lightning storm paths and serve as lookouts at night or at other times when patrol planes are not in the air." Today ten lookouts still stand in the Flathead.

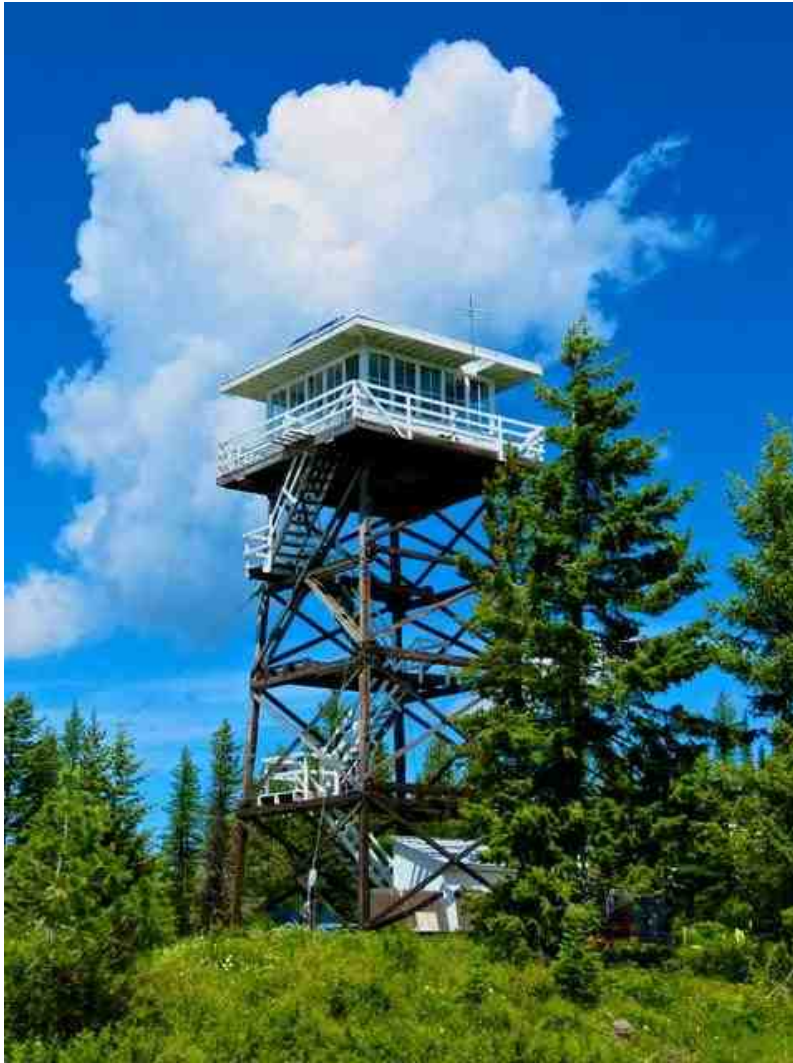
Firefighter Lookout turned 70 this year. Visitors continue to find the mountaintop a destination for an experience many have never had before. Near 360-degree views look into the South Fork of the Flathead, along the Hungry Horse Reservoir, and into the North Fork and Glacier National Park. A road off the South Fork Road winds its way to the top, although because of recent vandalism, people must park at a locked gate and walk a short distance to the lookout. Between November 1 and June 30, the lower gate on the lookout road is locked and a visit to the site is a four-mile slog up the road.

Not far along the road past the upper gate, Firefighter Lookout suddenly appears in the distance, tall and stately and sturdy enough to look like it might still stand in another 70 years.

Happy 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, Firefighter!

(Special thanks to Leif Haugen and Doug Berglund for information for this newsletter article. Also, special thanks to Kjell Petersen for edits and the photograph of Firefighter Lookout in its glory.)



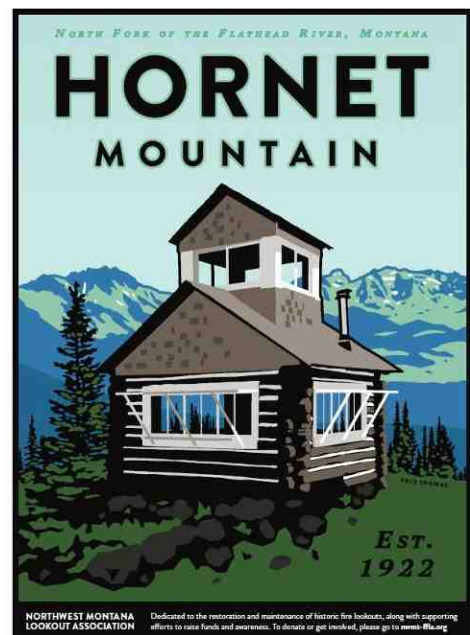


Firefighter Lookout

## HORNET POSTERS FOR SALE ON WEBSITE

If you haven't gotten one yet, we have this beautiful poster created by local graphic artist and NMLA Board Member Pete Thomas, honoring Hornet Lookout's Centennial, available in our online store [HERE](#)

Stay tuned for more local lookout posters in the future.



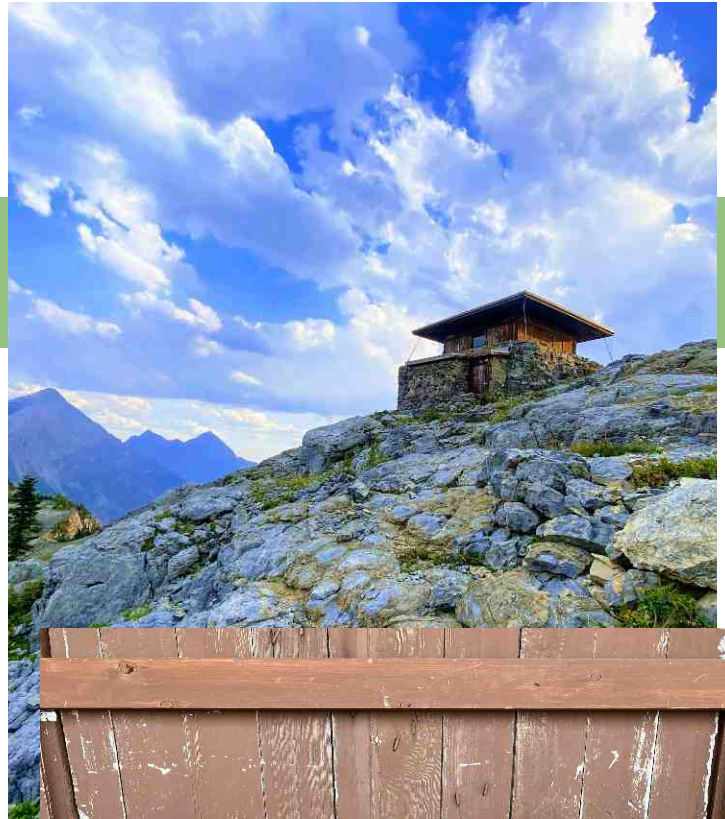


# ASSESSMENTS

Heavens Peak LO  
Glacier National Park

Heavens Peak Lookout was built by conscientious objectors who were members of the Civilian Public Service during World War II. The lookout uses native materials to integrate the structure into the landscape and was operational from 1945 until 1953. Extensive work to stabilize the structure was completed in 2013-14.

Joann Schmidt, Molly Tingley, and Joe Schmidt completed this assessment and were rewarded with relatively clear skies and expansive views including Chapman Peak, Mt Cleveland, the garden wall, Lake McDonald and the Camas drainage after bushwhacking to the lookout. The structure is generally in good shape, but is in need of extensive painting in addition to other repairs.





## Porcupine Ridge Lookout Glacier National Park



Porcupine Ridge Lookout sits at 7100 feet in oration projects to help keep it snug on the remote mountaintop. Porcupine Ridge is a challenging assessment! Logistical planning and support was a must! Passports, boat tickets, a backcountry permit, and answering a gazillion questions as to how to approach the project. Oddly enough, there were no tent shelters left at Goat Haunt for our volunteers, even with a permit. The 1st two fords of Valentine were dry (on 8/24), but that 3rd one was still a doozy. The trail was easy to find, except for navigation required at Valentine Creek, so the flagging there was appreciated. The trail is quite brushy/overgrown below treeline, but elevation, SSW of the Waterton Lakes Ranger Station in Glacier National Park. It was built in 1939, later abandoned for use in 1972, but has had a number of restgenerally an easy gradient. A very rewarding trip to the top of the world!

The lookout is in pretty good overall condition. It is mainly in need of routine maintenance such as painting, and some shutters could be replaced. Thank you Traute Parrie, Eric Godin, Katie Marsonette, and Tammy Bogovich for taking on the Porcupine Ridge assessment.





# Mount Henry Lookout Kootenai National Forest

Volunteers Kattie Marsonette, Cathy Calloway, and Karen K Downs had a bluebird day for a hike to Mount Henry Lookout on the Kootenai National Forest to do an assessment for future restoration needs. The lookout is in pretty good shape considering she was built in 1942 and has been out of use since 1978. She needs a major paint job and a few panes of glass replaced to restore her former glory. The outhouse however, flattened a few years ago by the elements is barely hanging in there, now propped up by rocks and boards - it needs some major attention!





## Lost Horse Lookout Kootenai National Forest



Located in the Kootenai National Forest, this seldom-seen lookout is reached by a flagged route after a 30-mile drive on a dirt road. Katie Marsonette, Barb Hvidzak, and Terry Divoky re-flagged the 2-mile route as they worked their way up to the lookout assessment. Greeted by the weather-grayed wooden tower, L-4 cab, and “butter box” was reward in itself. One can also see downtown Yaak, Mount Henry Lookout and the surrounding majestic mountains. Built in 1934, this little gem of a lookout needs the catwalk, steps, railings, and shutters repaired or replaced. Light shines through several small holes in the ragged roof which needs to be patched or better yet, re-shingled. Amazingly, inside, the cab is in good shape with intact windows and glazing. In 1994 it was wrapped to protect it from the Yaak-Red Dragon Complex Fire. (Barb and her husband, un-wrapped the lookout!). It would be a shame to lose this lookout to deterioration since it has withstood strong winds, snow, and weathering for countless years. Visit this lookout to take in its past through the historical “trash” and wood scattered around its base.

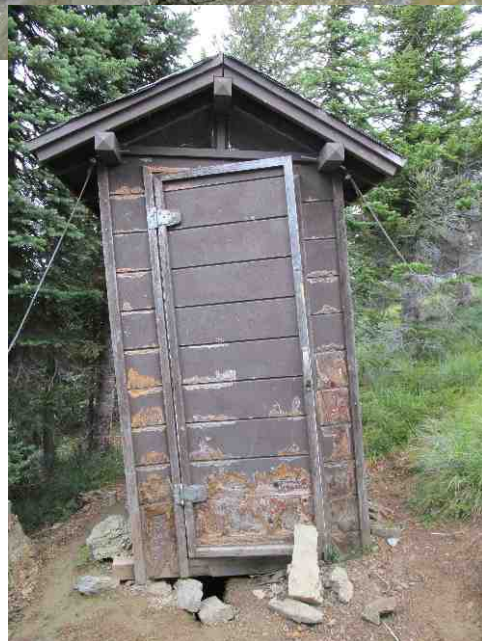




# Stahl Peak Lookout Kootenai National Forest



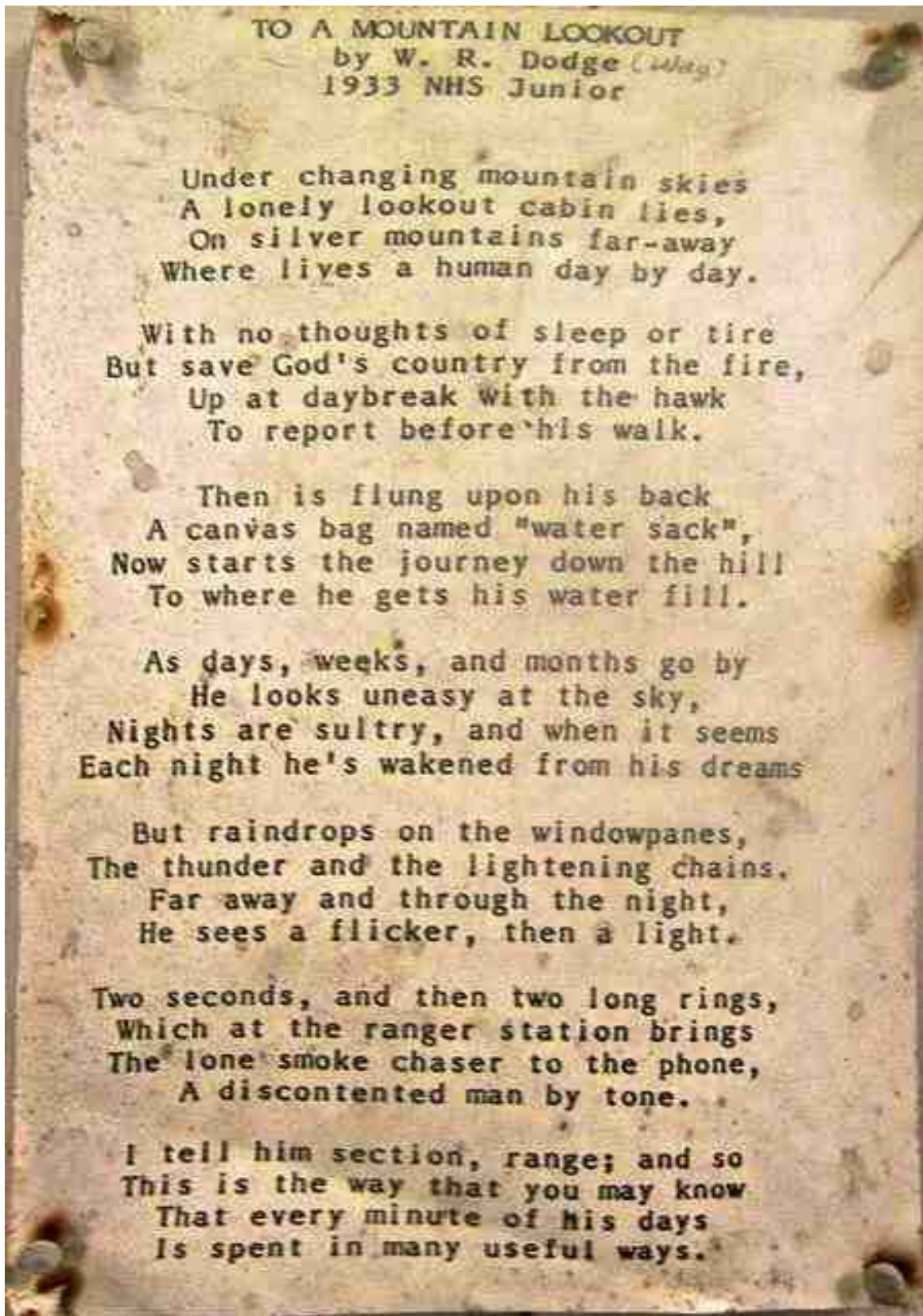
Karen Sheets, Mark Sheets, and Barb Hvizdak completed the assessment of Stahl Lookout on a cold, blustery day in late August. The D6 cupola-style lookout is perched dramatically on a cliff's edge in the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area of the Kootenai National Forest. The lookout can be reached by a number of trails. It's a common detour for thru-hikers on the Continental Divide Trail, offering shelter from inclement weather. At an elevation of 7,281' there are uninterrupted views of the entire Ten Lakes basin, Canada, and Glacier Park. The lookout itself is in a state of disrepair, something a coat of fresh paint and some basic carpentry could improve.





## REFLECTIONS FROM STAR PEAK 1933

Wag Dodge staffed Star Peak as a junior in high school in 1933 and authored this poem which is still tacked on the lookout wall. He went on to be a smokejumper and the foreman of the Mann Gulch fire in 1946. We are grateful to the Friends of Scotchman Peaks Wilderness and Sandy Compton for sharing this poem with us.







**THANKS!**

Of course we couldn't accomplish anything without our many supporters, partners, members and volunteers. We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts for your support, encouragement and donations of time and money over the years. We'd especially like to acknowledge the following lifetime members of NWLA. Thanks for believing in us!

***Rob Akey***

***Kate Baxter***

***Troy Denman***

***Mike Frost***

***Reggie Good & Barbara Bates***

***Beth Hodder***

***William & Anastasia Hoeft***

***Chuck & Nancy Manning***

***Francy McAllister***

***John & Heidi McAllister***

***Kip Melling & Jessie Coltrane***

***Gene & Myrtle Miller***

***Devi Morgan***

***Hazel Pearce***

***Kjell Petersen***

***Tom & Cindy Roberts***

***Mark & Karen Sheets***

***Bick Smith***

***Chuck Stearns & Rita Braun***

***Bill Swope***

***Helen Tyree***

***Earl Wayne Weaver***

***John Zardis***



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on the internet at [NWMT-FFLA.ORG](http://NWMT-FFLA.ORG)