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Fire Lookouts

Ever dream of having a fire lookout tower to yourself? Substitute for seasonal employees during their days off or staff a tower during a dry autumn, after the normal fire season has ended. For more, click on [Fire Lookouts](#).

Fire Lookouts (via link)

20 December 2009

Our fire lookout project got off to an excellent start in 2009. Nine persons were certified to staff a tower. Together, they served in three towers—Woody Mountain, O’Leary Peak, and Mount Elden—and contributed more than 300 hours of volunteer time.

The year 2010 promises to be even busier. Below you will find information about the lookout program: mission, skills you need or need to learn, and tasks at the tower. We look forward to your participation in the project.

To sign up or to have questions answered, please contact Bruce Belman, our coordinator. Phone: 928-527-4048. Email: svaileen@hotmail.com

If Bruce is not available, please direct your questions to Justin Loxley, the Volunteer Coordinator for the Forest Service. Phone: 928-527-8213. Email: jdloxley@fs.fed.us

Last revised on 20 December 2009

Friends of Northern Arizona Forests

Fire Tower Lookouts

Mission

During October 2008, while I was driving along Old Walnut Canyon Road, I noticed a plume of smoke rising from Anderson Mesa. When I called in the fire, I remarked that the Mount Elden lookout had probably seen the smoke already. I was astonished to hear the dispatcher tell me that no one was staffing the Elden lookout. Clearly, the Forest Service needs some help.

We aim to provide volunteers to substitute for seasonal lookouts during their days off and to staff towers during a dry autumn, after the normal fire season has ended. In 2010, we may even have a tower for which we alone are responsible all season long.

Our efforts focus on three towers in the Flagstaff area: Mount Elden, O’Leary Peak, and Woody Mountain.

Lookout Requirements (Known skills or learned)

To function as a lookout, a person needs the ability to read maps, to use radios, and to gather weather information. Most volunteers learn the technical parts of these skills by watching others perform the tasks. Opportunities to learn (at a working tower) will be provided.

- a. Firefinder. A large compass that has 360 degrees of movement and a sighting device.
- b. Maps. Located on the firefinder; other maps may be located within the tower. Need to be (or become) familiar with township, range, and section and also with latitude and longitude.
- c. Radio. A portable unit and (sometimes) a permanently mounted base unit. Instruction sheets will be available to serve as reminders.
- d. Weather. Collect information from the devices at the tower and report to the dispatcher.

Tasks at the Tower

- a. Location of fire. The lookout sights the fire with the firefinder and reads the heading (the direction). Then the lookout uses maps to identify landmarks near the fire and thus determines the (approximate) distance from the tower.
- b. Radio. Send the heading, distance, and a description of the fire to the dispatcher. The dispatcher then alerts aircraft and/or ground crews to the fire scene.
- c. Verification. The reverse process can also occur. The dispatcher or other lookouts may ask you to sight a fire whose coordinates they give you. The purpose is to verify or fine-tune the location.
- d. Relay. The lookout may also act as a relay for radio traffic when conditions require it.
- e. Record. Keep a log of all radio, weather, and fire information.

Time at the Tower

Towers are normally staffed from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Lunch break can be 30 minutes or an hour, and there's some flexibility in the starting and ending times of the day. If you cannot put in a full day, contributing half a day will often fit in and will be appreciated.

Notes by Ralph Baierlein, based on notes by Rick Zabor, Sedona FoF.