

## 2019 Indiana/Illinois Chapter Annual Report Forest Fire Lookout Association

**MEMBERSHIP:** The Indiana Chapter has 5 current members although one member lives in Missouri. The Illinois Chapter has 8 current members. The balance for the two states is \$130.

### **RESTORATION:**



**McCormicks Creek State Park Tower** – The Friends of McCormick’s Creek State Park held a celebration and ribbon cutting to reopen the Historic Fire Tower built in 1935 to the public. Through generous donations from over 200 local individuals, local schools and civic organizations, as well as businesses such as Indiana Hardwood Specialists and Babbs Supermarket they raised over \$100,000 to restore the fire to its original condition.

Grants were also awarded from the Efrogmson Family Fund, SCIREMC, the Indiana Parks Alliance, the Owen County Community Foundation and Owen County Preservations, among others. For the first time in decades the cab of the tower is accessible to the public on guided days when it is open and an attendant is on duty. Dennis Goen, FFLA member and former lookout towerman, has volunteered to man the tower for visitors on selected days.

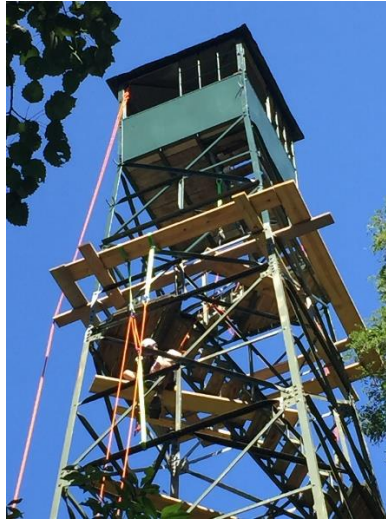


The tower was put on the National Historic Lookout Register on November 12, 2008.

The Friends group is now planning to build a commemorative plaza around the Fire Tower and an interpretive display about lookout towers for

the nature center. The plaza will allow the park to close the tower at night, for security and protection. The display will feature tools and resources that would have been used by the tower watchmen to protect our forests.

Trees were cleared for a 50-foot radius around the tower to decrease the risk of future damage to the structure. Photos below show workers repelling down to work on the side of the tower, scaffolding on the tower legs, and the completed tower after restoration was complete.



### ACTIVITIES:

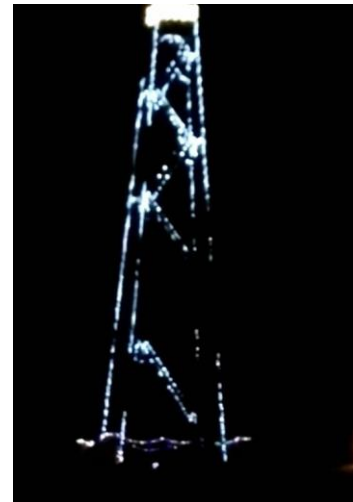


### Ouabache Fire Tower

Ouabache State Park, now that their fire tower is restored has implemented a new fundraiser. This was their 2<sup>nd</sup> year and its been an amazing success. Called the Wonderland of Lights it runs through the months of December. It is organized by their Friends group and



though the gate is not manned by the DNR during December, the Friends man the gate, charge \$5/car in the evenings for people to come in and see the lights. They get sponsors to decorate the campground sites, the nature center, and the fire tower. The fire tower is lit up and choreographed to



music so that the lights “dance” to the music. People flock to see the Wonderland of Lights. This year they made almost \$10,000 all of which goes back to the park to help them with expenses and extra projects.

The fire tower is the star of the lightshow and draws interest not only to the park but also to fire towers in general.

## **Willow Valley Fire Tower**



The Willow Valley Fire Tower (shown at left) stands on the hill in Martin State Forest. A hiking trail winds up and around it and the tower can be climbed, though you can't enter the cab. In 2019 the Indiana Volkswalks Association (Teena is the Vice President) hosted a volkwalk at Martin State Forest and offered a 10K and a 5K volkwalk at Martin State Forest. Both distances walked up and around the lookout tower.

Though it was a wet muddy day, we had 48 people come out and walk the volkwalk and ate brats with us when they finished and as part of the walk they learned about the State Forest and the tower. It was a great day, and then, just as we were packing up, the skies opened up and it poured! Great timing. It was a good opportunity to give more visibility to a lookout tower. People came from all over

Indiana, as well as some from Kentucky and Illinois.

### **PLAN OF WORK FOR 2020:**

- I still hope to interview both the widow of the German Ridge towerman and re-interview the Hickory Ridge towerman's widow. I'll write a story for the magazine if I can get good stories from these women.
- I want to work with Bev Stout, IDNR Fire Prevention Specialist to get school history classes in the communities around lookout towers involved in researching their history. This should help us with the nominations for the towers up for selection for the Register. We also want to get the rest of our towers on the Register so will get classes to research those as well. This will also get a new generation interested in lookout towers.
- Contact the State Parks and Forests in the state to generate an inventory of needed work on towers and update the information on towers that we currently have. Offer to give programs on lookout towers at the parks.

**Respectfully submitted:** Teena Ligman, Chapter Chair  
16 January, 2020