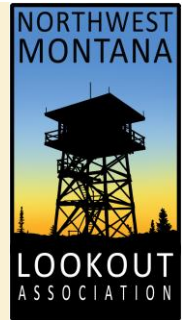


# NORTHWEST MONTANA LOOKOUT ASSOCIATION

*Dedicated to the preservation of forest fire lookouts  
in Northwest Montana*



**Fall 2024**

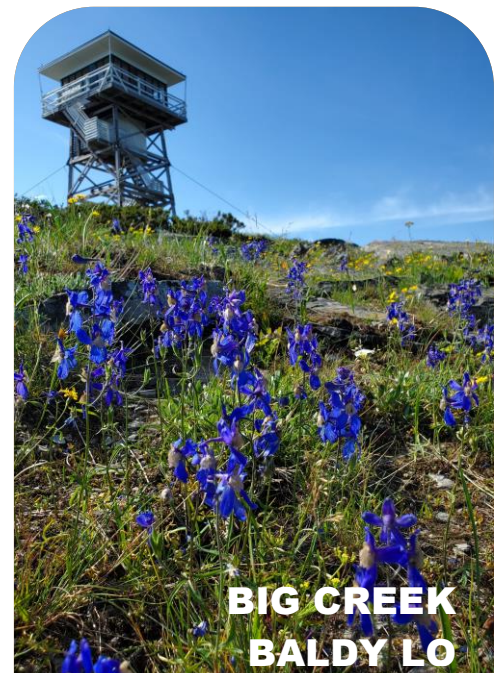
**STAHL LO**

## ***NOTES FROM THE BOARD***

As our beautiful fall days turn cold and the first snow signals the change in season, the Northwest Montana Lookout Association winds up this year's work and begins to look forward to next summer. Tremendous thanks to all of our volunteers and supporters who make our work possible, and so enjoyable.

This past year we reflected with pride on our 10 years of restoring lookouts. We had another summer busy with priority projects. There is always more to do, and our assessment trips help us prepare for efficient work in future years. This year dozens of volunteers worked from April to September on 5 projects and 3 assessments, contributing over 1300 person hours and an in-kind value of more than \$67,000 to the Kootenai National Forest and Glacier National Park. Please take a few minutes to read about this year's accomplishments, plus a bit of lookout history.

*Chuck Manning, Board Chair*



**BIG CREEK  
BALDY LO**

## ***NEW BOARD MEMBER***



We are happy to announce that Kira Powell has recently joined the NMLA Board. Kira currently works in public relations in the natural resources field. She spends her free time outdoors and aspires to hike every trail on the Flathead National Forest. Kira has a keen interest in the history of fire management, loves a good story, and would spend every day on mountain trail runs if she could get away with it. Turns out, lookouts are a delightful blend of her passions. In 2022, Kira traded the Cabinet Mountains for the Flathead Valley and now calls Somers home. Luckily for her, the Kootenai National Forest has lookouts aplenty to provide her an opportunity to revisit her old stomping grounds. She's grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Lookout Association as a member of the Board.

Kira helped with this year's Stahl lookout restoration and shared the following profile of Stahl.

### **Partnership and historic restoration at Stahl Peak Lookout**

Before remote sensing and infrared imaging, detecting wildfires across millions of acres of National Forest was the responsibility the sharp-eyed fire lookouts spread across the mountain tops were the first alerts to new fire starts. As a result, hundreds of fire lookouts were built in Montana. At their pinnacle, 639 men spent their summers in Montana's lookouts, scanning the horizons, ready to spring into action if they spotted smoke. These lookouts were staffed for decades and were highly effective in detecting fires. As forest management policy and technology evolved, lookouts have by and large gone to the wayside. Today, approximately 40 lookouts are still staffed in Montana.

Located on mountain tops to maximize the vantage point for detecting fires, the structures are constantly exposed to harsh mountain conditions. Strong winds, rain, lightning, daily frost and thaw cycles, unshaded summer sun, and months of snow slowly disintegrate the lookouts. Unstaffed lookouts are standing remnants wood and rusty metal, relics of a time long past. The Forest Service provides facilities maintenance as possible but unstaffed lookouts may not receive the attention they need as employees work to maintain facilities and infrastructure across millions of acres.



Stahl Peak Lookout, located on the Rexford-Fortine (Ksanka) District of the Kootenai National Forest outside of Fortine, Montana, was one of many lookouts constructed during the height of lookout staffing. The semi-constructed cabin kit was packed in 16 miles up Graves Creek to Stahl Peak summit by Burt Wilke and Lee Parvin, local wranglers, in the Fall of 1926. It took three trips with 18 mules to transport all the material and supplies. Snow fell before the job was completed so the final date of construction of the lookout was Spring 1927. Stahl is not a staffed lookout or a part of recreation rental program, serving instead as a scenic destination for those willing to hike a couple miles off the Pacific Northwest Trail.

Stahl Peak Lookout had fallen to the bottom of the maintenance priority list, but Legacy Restoration Funds, made possible by the Great American Outdoors Act, provided critical funding to maintain the lookout.

That is where the Northwest Chapter of the Montana Lookout Association comes in. Along with the support of Back Country Horsemen of Montana and the Kootenai National Forest, the lookout received \$1,700 of Legacy Restoration Funds for maintenance.

The initial size up of Stahl Peak Lookout by Chuck Manning, president of the Northwest Chapter of the Montana Lookout Association, resulted in a long list of needed repairs: new shutters, several new windows and a full re-glazing, soffit and fascia repair, paint top to bottom, and a thorough cleaning and de-mousing.



Two pack strings from the Back Country Horseman of Montana packed gallons of paint, a ladder, nine-foot boards to repair the shutters, panes of glass, power tools and batteries, hand tools and hardware the five miles to the lookout. Fully equipped for the job, the volunteers got to work.

“I can’t help but be drawn to the history and mystique of these

lookouts.” says Kira Powell, volunteer with the Northwest Montana Lookout Association. “Some of us sign up to help with a specific lookout that has personal significance but a lot of us just love the challenge of working in the backcountry, using our carpentry skills for restoration work at high elevations with amazing views.”

Over the course of five days, volunteers cleaned out the lookout and cupola of flotsam, garbage, and broken or forgotten things, sorting what is still useful and what should be packed out. They cleaned out the rodent droppings. They diligently scraped old, peeling paint from the exterior of the lookout to help the fresh coat last, caulked cracks in the lower exterior walls and patched the window glazing to better protect the structure from harsh weather, and at the end of a hard week’s work, they prepped the supplies and trash (including broken glass) for stock to pack out.



Despite the difficult work and challenging conditions, the volunteers at Stahl Peak Lookout finished the trip with morale high, looking forward to signing up to help again for next year’s trips.

While more work is needed, the volunteers’ accomplishments made a significant and visible difference to the lookout, thanks to GAOA and Northwest Montana Lookout Association’s dedicated work over the years to keep these lookouts in historical shape. Thanks to the partnership between the Kootenai National Forest, the Northwest Montana Lookout Association, the Northwest Montana chapter of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana, and Legacy Restoration Funds, several of the Kootenai National Forest’s lookouts have received critical maintenance this year. These partnerships allow organizations and agencies to align their visions and combine their efforts, accomplishing important work that transcends organizational boundaries.

The Northwest Montana Lookout Association warmly welcomes new volunteers. Learn more about our mission and how to help on the website [HERE](#)  
Learn about the Back Country Horsemen of Montana [HERE](#)  
Read more about the Legacy Restoration Fund Projects made possible through the Great American Outdoors Act [HERE](#) and [HERE](#)



## IDAHO FIRE LOOKOUTS

Here's a shout out to a new organization, **IDAHO FIRE LOOKOUTS**, founded and organized by Cat House and Billy Cooter. Cat says:

“Our mission at IDAHO FIRE LOOKOUTS is to help preserve the history of both the structures and the legacy of the men and women who worked the lookouts.”

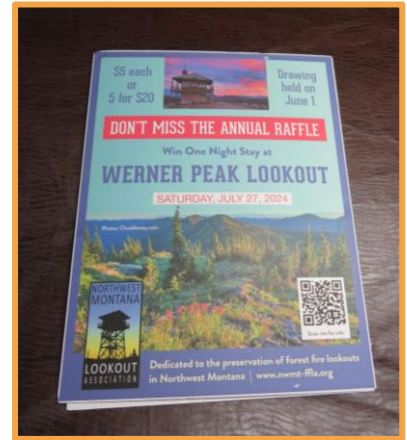
Check out their [website](#) for stories, history, photos and trip reports to many of Idaho's great lookouts. They are also running an online Lookout Book Club (check their Facebook page) and have some cool merch.



# CELEBRATING 10 YEARS



In November we enjoyed a Volunteer Appreciation night at the Stonefly Lounge in Coram. This was fitting, as the Stonefly was the site of an organizational meeting for the Northwest Montana Lookout Association 10 years ago. Thanks to all who attended to share some food, a beer, and great lookout stories.



## 2024 PROJECTS --KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST



This year we helped complete a special project to highlight the history of Roberts Lookout, which now resides at the Tobacco Valley Historical Village in Eureka, MT. See text of the new sign below.

Thank you, Terry Divoky for coordinating with Darris Flanagan to complete an interpretive sign to help tell the story of this lookout.

Roberts Lookout was established as a crows nest lookout in a tree in 1920. In 1924 the wooden 6x6 cab and the 40 foot tower were built. The lookout sat on Roberts Mountain just west of Fortine. Locals called it “Shorty’s Lookout” for Ross "Shorty" Young who was stationed there from 1924 to 1943. He was a trapper, a brick mason, a machinist, gunsmith, and cook par excellence. Young’s usual Forest Service duties were maintaining trails and repairing telephone lines before spending the fire season on the lookout. After the fire season, he constructed new trails until the work season was over. The tower was last used in 1962 and moved to the Tobacco Valley Museum in 1979 after it was donated to the museum by the Forest Service. Funding for this sign furnished by the Northwest Montana Lookout Association.

## STAR PEAK WINDOWS



Star Peak is an L-4 hip roof style lookout on the Cabinet Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest. It is considered the first forest fire lookout in Montana. In 1910 a cabin was constructed using native stone and serving as a living quarter for the lookout staff. The current L4 lookout was constructed in 1957. The lookout was staffed and maintained until 2003. Time and weather have taken its toll and the lookout needs attention. NMLA will be an important contributor to an extensive restoration of this historic structure.



The windows workshop began in early April with steaming the windows to loosen the glazing and paint, removing the glass and repairing the frames. Twenty-six volunteers working in small groups, working on weekends April and May. They scraped, prepared, primed, glazed in the windows, primed, and painted two coats of paint on the 19 Star Peak window frames. On May 31 the windows were delivered to Star Peak Lookout via helicopter.



Thanks to Maya Anderson, Barbara Bates, Randy Beacham, Rick Davis, Greg Evans, Reggie Good, Chris Holdhusen, Barb Hvizdak, Peter Kitts, Inez Love, Kate Marsonette, Erin McGowan, Mark Miller, Dawn Navarro, Steve Penner, Maya Rao, Robert Saint-Louis, Joe Schmidt, Charles Stearns, Donald Stolte, Helen Tyree and Chuck Manning for competing this detailed work!







## STAR PEAK

Star Peak is on the Cabinet Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest. In June of this year the KNF Helitack crew flew the windows back up to the lookout and helped with the installation. NMLA volunteers installed new shutters (built on-site in 2023-24), repaired shutter outriggers, painted the lookout exterior, interior, and interior floor. 2024 leaves the lookout in a restored condition.

Lovely weather and even better volunteers! Thank to volunteers Klare Matthew, Katherine Maudrone, Bob and Seth Lambrect, and Jeff Grotjohn of the Backcountry Horsemen for helping complete this project.



## MCGUIRE LOOKOUT

McGuire Lookout is a D6 Cupola on the Ksanka Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest. Did you know McGuire Lookout is celebrating its 100 year anniversary this year?

July was the perfect time for a project to complete some final touches in an August Volunteer project. This year our volunteer team repaired and painted the storage shed (built in the 80s), built a summer shutter storage cover, and provided some general maintenance. A big thank you to our volunteers Helen Tyree, Jim Peacock, Barb Hvizdak, Chuck Manning for helping keep this piece of history alive for all to enjoy.



## WAM LOOKOUT

The Mount Wam Lookout is on the Ksanka District of the Kootenai NF. The rehab project of Mt. Wam is close to being completed. After a scheduling change affected planned work, one day in August was committed to doing a pre-project assessment and one day to shutter brace repairs. We now have a clearer idea of what needs to be done to finish the shutter repair next year. In the near future the roof and ridge caps will also need to be addressed. Thanks to the team of Barb Hvizdak, Mark Miller, Chuck Manning and a YCC Crew for their efforts this year.

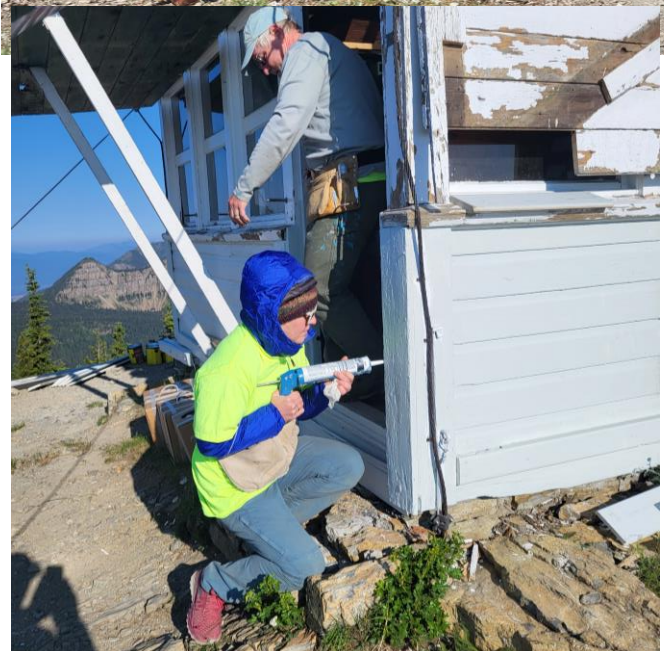
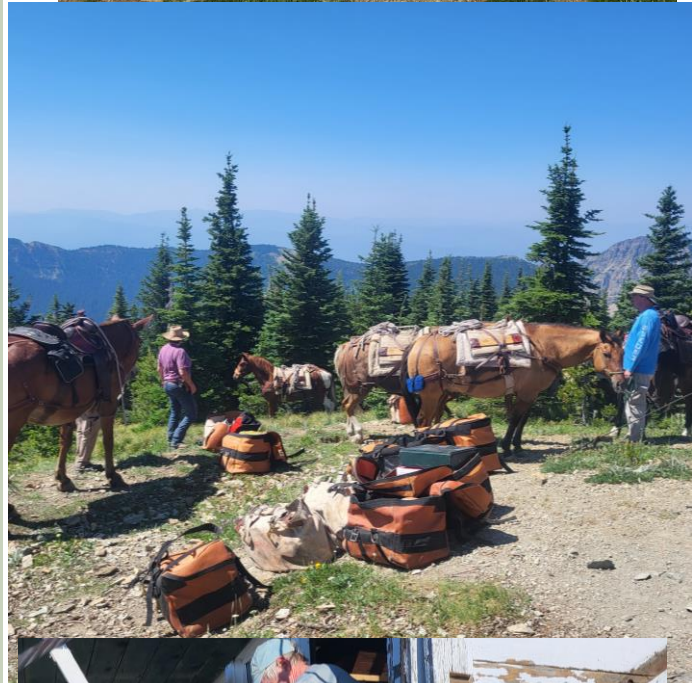


## STAHL PEAK

Stahl Peak, a cupola style lookout, is located on the Ksanka District of the Kootenai National Forest, got a tune-up from some of our amazing volunteers this July. A pre-project assessment determined the supplies that needed to be packed in for the 5-day project.

This year's work included cleaning out the lookout cab and cupola, scraping and painting the exterior (2 coats), replacing 2 cupola windows that were repaired offsite, shutter repairs and painting, work towards rodent-proofing and work on cupola shutters. . A major rehab of Stahl Peak Lookout is tentatively planned for 2026.

Deep gratitude to our volunteer crew for their tireless energy and support. Thanks Mark Gunther, Barb Hvizdak, Chuck Stearns, Kira Powell, and Chuck Manning! Thanks also to the Northwest Montana Back Country Horsemen for their support of this project--Alden Totten, Rick Mathies, John Peine, Wendy Monfort, and Bonny Pollock.





## NORTHWEST PEAK LO

Northwest Peak is an L4 prototype on the Three Rivers District of the Kootenai National Forest.

This July's project found our volunteer removing the windows and inserting plywood panels to protect the lookout over the winter. This initial phase of the project was completed by NMLA volunteers Peter Kitts and John Zardis with the help of several Forest Service employees and a Youth Conservation crew. The windows were helicoptered out by a coordinated effort of the KNF Helitack crew and other fire personnel. Also, a pre-project assessment was conducted by Peter Kitts and Chuck Manning to determine the sequence, materials, and costs of tasks that need to be addressed in 2025.



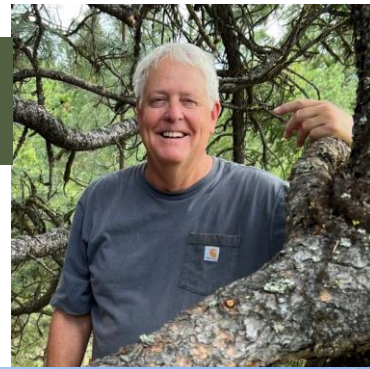
# WERNER LOOKOUT RAFFLE WINNER

Congratulations to our 2024 Werner Peak Raffle Winner, David Easter!

David said this about his stay:

“What a joy it was to ascend, pick hucks and explore the mountaintop trails around Werner Peak! The smoky haze only enhanced the ridge lines of this beautiful sunset. The lookout cabin was clean, comfortable and perfectly situated for a 360-degree view of the surrounding peaks. We would have loved another night or two; so, we’ll be back at some future time. Thanks to the folks at Northwest Montana Lookout Association! “

Thank you to everyone who purchased raffle tickets and for your continued support of fire lookout preservation in Northwest Montana. It takes all of us!



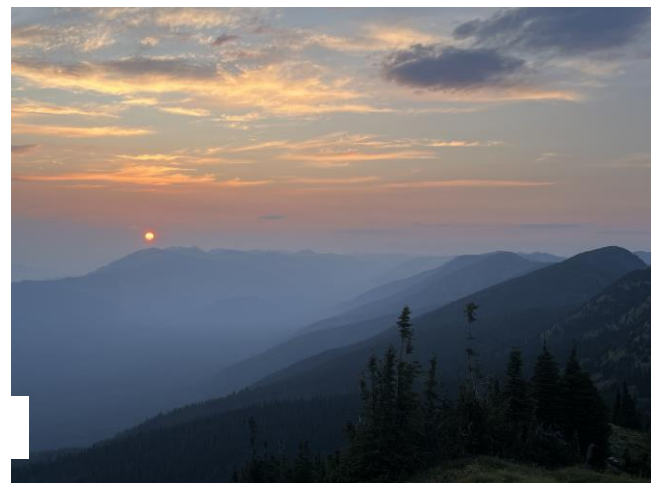
Happiness, on top o’ the world



Werner’s Majesty



“Total Peace, Totally!”



Pastel Painting Paradise

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## A Lifetime of Lookout Experiences

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“I don't know how many other lookouts can say that they served on a lookout in diapers,” grinned Dan Yuhas during a recent NMLA interview. Dan offers a unique perspective, having been first introduced to the lookout world in 1947 at eight months old, and later volunteering on lookouts as an adult.



Having no personal memories of when his parents took him to Desert Mountain Lookout in the Flathead National Forest, Dan relied on “family legends or family lore,” not knowing if the stories were true. But in 1973, Dan took his wife up to Desert Mountain Lookout and met the young couple on duty. They told Dan they had something to show him. From the tower, they brought down piece of mirror with a bunch of names scratched on the back. Dan found his parents’ names and his from 1947, and he realized the family stories had credibility.



Dan visited lookouts for enjoyment while he taught in Martin City, Montana. Later, he and his wife, Jill Rocksund, had a chance to experience life together as volunteer lookouts, “sort of in honor of my folks, sort of satisfying our own curiosity. And we’re glad we did.”

His parents’ lookout stories included always having a scarcity of water, so his dad had to drive or hike two to three miles down to a spring. “And with that precious water, my mother would wash cloth diapers; in those days there weren't disposables yet. She spread them out on the beargrass to dry. And I can't believe her patience as a young, young mother, to first of all say, ‘Yes, I'll go serve on the lookout with my husband, and a baby,’ but then to face all the challenges of the days of Coleman lanterns and Coleman stoves for cooking and hand washing cloth diapers and all the adventures that come from that.”

Dan’s dad was stationed at Mount May in what’s now the Great Bear Wilderness before his parents married. “He would hike out through Gooseberry Park and Schafer Meadows. And then on to Highway 2 at the confluence of Bear Creek and the Middle Fork of the Flathead River, and then either hitchhike or grab a bus to get to Wolf Creek, Montana, where his sweetheart, my mom, lived. And I understand that they would go to the Wolf Creek School dance and enjoy each other's company there.”

Dan’s father’s career was with the Forest Service, and as his mom “hooked her wagon to his star, she went along with the whole adventure.” Dan mostly grew up living at the Big Creek Ranger Station, Glacier View District, now the Glacier Institute, where his dad was the ranger. With few kids to play with, he played cowboys and Indians with his sister, and set traps for ground squirrels. Dan remembers a single engine diesel generator provided electricity, and at times the generator had to be restarted. He recalls once when his sister and he were watching their baby brother Mikey while their mom put laundry on the line, Mikey disappeared. Panic grabbed them as they thought he may have fallen into Big Creek, or a mother moose and calf got him. At long last, they saw two legs sticking out from underneath the wet sheets on the clothesline. Mikey stood sucking his thumb and rubbing his wet “blankie” against his cheek as it hung on the clothesline.

Later, Dan and family lived in a trailer on the Canyon Creek Road when his dad was a scaler for the district. “He would come home at the end of the day and meet us at the road, which was virtually where we had the trailer parked, and find out what had happened during our day and hug us both. And I can remember to this day the smell of his cruisers' vest, which was canvas and always smelled like the pitch on the ends of logs that he was scaling during the day.”

Dan's father was later stationed at the Moran Work Station, no longer there. Dan remembers cold root beer stored in Moran Creek, and Dan's dad being called on the crank telephone calling him up for the Korean War. While he was in Korea, the rest of the family lived in Helena with Dan's grandparents.

What stands out most vividly in Dan's mind while living on the Glacier View District were the kindnesses that people extended to his family and being invited to go along with seasonal employees to hike into a fishing lake in Glacier Park.

As an adult, Dan and Jill have served as volunteers on Cooney Lookout in the Swan Valley and on Firefighter Lookout along the Hungry Horse Reservoir. He says he never really appreciated how tough life must have been for his folks on the lookout that they spent there with a baby. Water is now available in cubies [five-gallon plastic cube-shaped containers]. “Thank goodness for cubies. Thank goodness for solar electricity; solar provided the battery systems that allow you to recharge your cell phone...and recharge your radio on the lookout.” He also enjoys propane refrigerators, propane stoves, and ice.

Regarding his lookout experiences, Dan would pass on to any possible inductee into the lookout world that you are the face of the federal government, so keep that in mind when you greet and visit with people. Also, he and Jill have been surprised at how much a 14-1/2 x 14-1/2 space is your home. How you make that known to visitors lets people know someone lives there (they take flowers with them and put them at the base of the lookout). And the dogs they have had reenforce the home feeling and add an element of welcome to visitors.

Dan keeps busy with carpentry projects that don't require great eyesight or great hearing like Jill has, so Jill mostly takes over the roles of radio operator and fire spotter.

Perhaps Dan's love of lookouts is summed up when he discusses leaving his lookout at the end of his stay.

“Once you leave the lookout for your volunteer stint you feel completely unhooked from the system and you really crave knowing what's going on daily. What fires have been spotted? Who's had great visitors? and that kind of thing. What is the weather like? What is the daily relative humidity and direction of wind? and What kind of lightning activity level? We find ourselves leaving a stint really missing that, and I guess it reminds me that you become part of a forest-wide family, so much so that it's always hugs when you see each other in person at the beginning and ending potlucks of the season. And the most eloquent way of mentioning that, I suppose, came from Inez Love who remembers a TV show called *The Waltons*. And she always saw the check-in at the end of the day, right at the end of the afternoon, as the "Good Night, John Boy" experience. You hear everybody report in. You know everybody's probably good for the night and you may contact them again by cell phone or whatever to visit further, but that check-in at the end of the day was like the greetings in the Walton family on TV. Thank you, Inez Love, for that.”

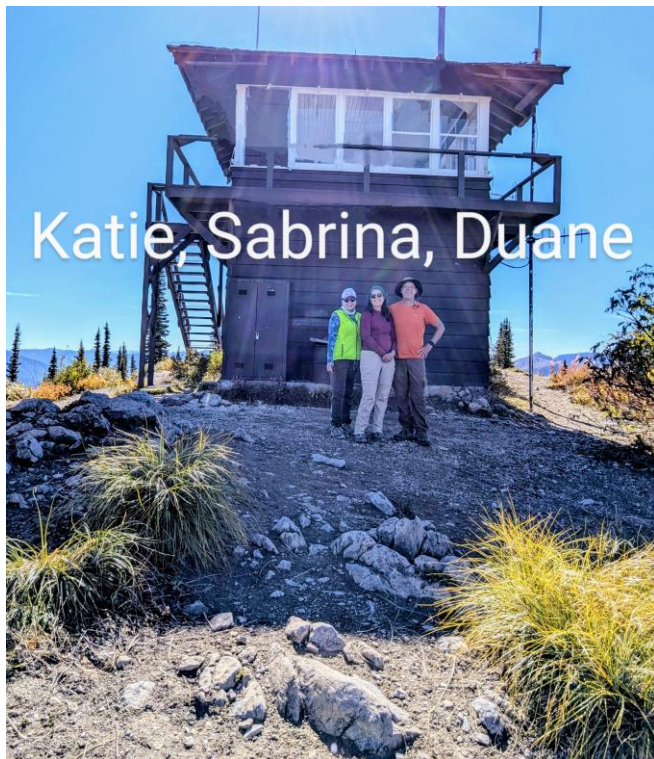
Finally, Dan says that watching fires has been a classroom for Jill and him, so much so that they have been bitten to volunteer for another season—or several.



# 2024 Assessments

Assessments are an important part of the overall work flow for both NWMTLA and our partner Agencies. They are done to a standardized format, with detailed photos, and help Agencies to set priorities among lookouts for when/if work will be done. NWMTLA can then use the assessment and photos to identify material needs and develop budgets seek out grant and partner opportunities, In other words, we can't do successful projects without good assessments!

We are working towards setting up a schedule with agencies so that lookouts with completed work can be visited for a follow-up assessment and routine maintenance on a regular basis.



Katie, Sabrina, Duane



## GLACIER NP

### GLACIER NP

#### SCALPLOCK LOOKOUT

Scalplock Mountain Lookout, built in 1931, overlooks the Middle Fork of the Flathead River and the Great Bear Wilderness to the west and south. Katie Marsonette, Duane Day and Sabrina Shattles conducted an assessment in September to determine the lookout's general condition and report any urgent repairs that needed to be completed before winter. Several items of concern were reported. Scalplock Lookout is assessed every three years in accordance with a Cooperative Management Agreement.



## HUCKLEBERRY LOOKOUT

Huckleberry Lookout overlooks the North Fork of the Flathead River and the Camas drainage in Glacier National Park. This assessment was conducted to scope out findings for any stabilization and/or restoration efforts. Some areas of rot, rodent access to the cab, and need for a paint touch-up were noted this year. Katie Marsonette, Eric Godin and Joe Schmidt conducted this assessment in August.



## LONEMAN LOOKOUT

In August of 2024, a comprehensive assessment of the historic Loneman Fire Lookout situated in the Nyack area of Glacier National Park, was conducted by Amanda McIntosh, Mark Miller and Molly Tingley. The assessment revealed that while the interior of the lookout is in good condition, the exterior included weakened and rotting catwalk and worn paint. The findings underscore the need for preservation work to ensure the tower's stability and safety, while maintaining its historical and functional value as a critical piece of the park's fire management history.



## WHY IS IT CALLED STAHL ?

Do you ever wonder how lookouts (and mountains) got their names? Many were named after prominent figures in local history, or early homesteaders. Thanks to Doug Berglund for doing the detective work on the person behind the name of Stahl Creek, Peak and lookout.

Arthur Stahl was one of eight children in the Stahl family, born in Jackson Michigan in 1876. The Stahl family moved to the Flathead valley in 1891 where they established a brick-making business. Their production steadily increased until they were making 900,000 bricks a year. With his brother John, Arthur also established a general contracting and building business. They laid bricks for the Central School, Conrad Bank (1892), Kalispell Mercantile building and most every other brick building in Kalispell. Their brickyard continued to thrive, and they constructed buildings as far away as Butte, Anaconda, and Spokane. The Daily Interlake (1899) noted that the brothers were “two of our most enterprising and progressive citizens”.

They sold the brick yard in 1900 and Arthur moved to the Eureka area where Census data says that he had a Lime Quarry near Roosville and helped build the store that became the Eureka Commercial. He also trapped in the Tobacco Valley country where a creek, mountain, and lookout bear his name. By 1912, he had moved to Alberta, Canada and was farming with his brother Edward. He became a naturalized citizen of Canada in 1914. Albert served in World War I with the Canadian Engineering Corps. After his discharge he took on a new homestead in the Peace River. He ran a 600 line trapline northwest of Edmonton

He returned to the Tobacco valley several times to visit before he died in Cranbook, BC in 1962 at the age of 86.

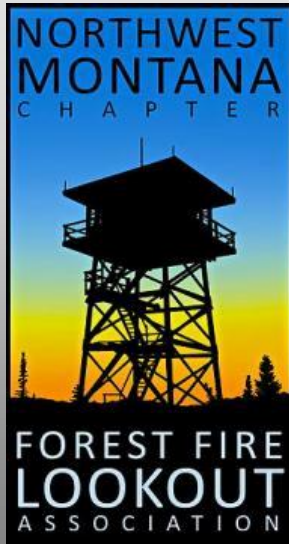
His brother Edward became a forest ranger with the U.S. Forest Service after participating in the first forestry civil service exam in 1905. You can read more about his life in this first person account [HERE](#)

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### ORAL LOOKOUT HISTORIES

*We continue to add to our collection of interviews. You can find links [HERE](#)*

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## SAVE THE DATES

Planning is underway for next year's WILDERNESS SPEAKER SERIES. Projected dates are

- February 19
- March 19
- April 16.

Hope to see you there. If you missed this year's talks, you can see videos [HERE](#)

To keep in touch, follow our active postings on  
& our website: <http://www.nwmt-ffla.org>



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