

NORTHWEST MONTANA LOOKOUT ASSOCIATION

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



Northwest Peak LO

NOTES FROM THE BOARD

Our 2025 season was another busy and successful one. It wouldn't have been possible without the support of our Agency and Backcountry Horsemen partners who streamline much of the logistics of our projects. From helicopter crews ferrying in refurbished windows and shutters, to pack strings carrying everything from scaffolding, to building materials and our food supplies, all are essential support that make our volunteer projects possible.

And, of course, our dedicated volunteers, members and donors were so supportive again this year. In total, we provided work in-kind of 160 person days and \$68,573 to our Agency partners. Many thanks to all from our Lookout Board.

Chuck Manning, Board Chair



Wam LO

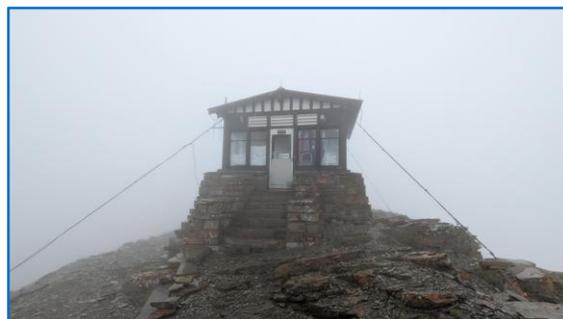
2025 Project Review

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

ASSESSMENTS

Swiftcurrent Lookout, built in 1936, is perched along the Continental Divide above Granite Park Chalet at an elevation of 8436'. The lookout is the highest point accessible by trail in the park. A popular hiking destination, it is the only lookout in the park without a catwalk.

This summer volunteers Kyle Stelter and Greg Evans, completed a repeat condition assessment. The Swiftcurrent lookout is in generally good condition with no major defects or rehabilitation issues noted. Ongoing maintenance needs, particularly scraping and painting, were identified.



Built in 1934, **Numa Ridge Lookout** is located on the ridge west of Numa Peak, just north of Bowman Lake. Numa overlooks the North Fork of the Flathead River drainage. Numa is a standard wood frame, 14x14-ft house set on a 10-ft tower with catwalk. It is the most northern lookout in the park, being only nine miles south of the Canadian border. It is reached by trail from Lake Bowman, and is still staffed for fire detection.

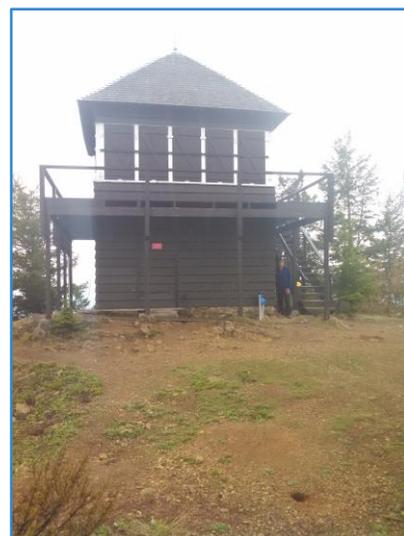
This summer's condition assessment found the lookout's exterior in need of some work, with structural repairs and replacement needed on the foundation, catwalk/railings, stairs/railings and some of the siding. The entire exterior is in need of scraping and painting while the interior is in overall good shape. The door is also in need of some repair work. Thanks to our assessment crew of Rick Murphy and Barb Hvizdak for their thorough inspection.



GLACIER PARK ASSESSMENTS (more)

Apgar Lookout overlooks Lake McDonald. It is a two-story wooden structure with an enclosed 10-ft tower and 14- by 14-ft cab. This is one of two basic designs found in the park. The first lookout was constructed on the site in 1929 and was destroyed by fire two weeks after completion. This identical structure was built in 1930. Located a mile high, it is the lowest elevation lookout in the park and is a popular hiking destination for many park visitors.

This summer's condition assessment found the lookout to be in good shape with primarily minor cosmetic repairs needed. Areas of potential rodent intrusion, graffiti and some window gaps were noted. Thanks to volunteers Molly Tingley, Greg Evans, Emily Crawford for braving the elements to get the job done.



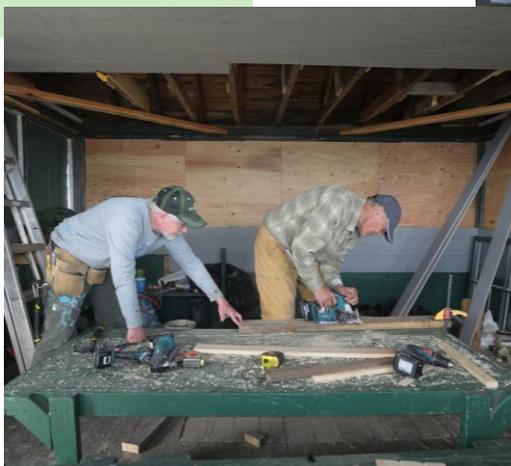
KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST

Northwest Peak Lookout

Northwest Peak Lookout is located in the Yaak on the Three Rivers Ranger District. It is perched on a mountain of broken talus overlooking the Northwest Peak Scenic Area. Northwest Peak was first used as a patrol camp in 1921. Then in 1929 a prototype gable L-4 ground house was constructed, the forerunner of the classic L-4 model built throughout the west. Abandoned for fire detection in 1955, it survived the elements and was restored in the 1980s as a historic site. Few of these gable roof L-4s remain.

This major project started last year with the removal of all windows which were flown off by helicopter and refurbished over the winter by Edd Kuropat and Peter Kitts. The windows and other materials were flown back up to the lookout in June in advance of this summer's project. This year our volunteers stabilized all four walls to address major structural deficiencies. Installation began on the ceiling which was removed and reinforced in 2017. Additional hardware and material needs were identified to complete window and shutter installation next year.

This year's onsite NMLA volunteers were Peter Kitts, Mark Gunther, John Zardis, Chuck Stearns, Randy Beacham, and Chuck Manning. Special thanks go to the Cabinet Back Country Horsemen for their support in helping transport tools and supplies to a base camp located just off the talus slope. Also, a huge thank you must go out to the Three Rivers Ranger District and the Kootenai National Forest Helitack Team for their ongoing support.



There has been a lookout on Big Creek Baldy on the Libby Ranger District since 1929. The current 15 x 15-foot flattop on a 41-foot base was built in 1966. It is north east of Libby in the Purcell Range and is accessible by (rough) road.

Work has been occurring on Big Creek Baldy for several years, with a new roof, lightning protection and securing the hatch to the roof already completed. In addition, the Libby Ranger District crew of Micha and Zach helped with securing landings and new handrails at the landings and a new wire mesh was installed for safety and stability on the catwalk. Needs and materials were prioritized with NMLA, and all materials were purchased through the challenge cost share program with Libby Ranger District.

This year the volunteer crew of Deb and Bob Starling, Salena and Mark Beckwith did get a new railing on the catwalk. This also improved stability and safety for those visiting this great lookout. A special thank you to the crew for hanging in there and the Ranger District for their patience in working with us!

There will be future need on this lookout including scraping and staining/painting,

Big Creek Baldy Lookout

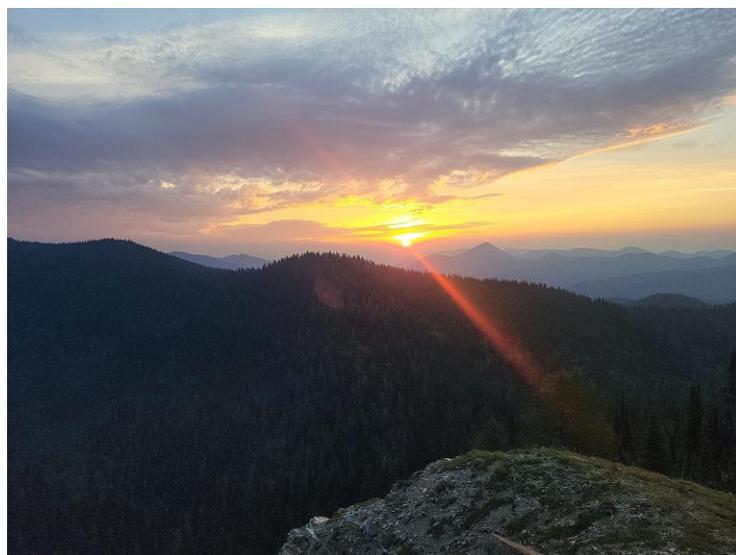
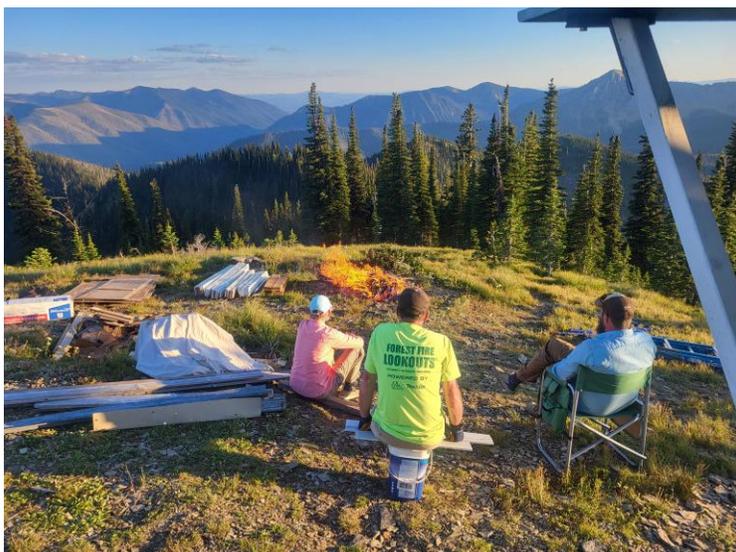




Wam Lookout

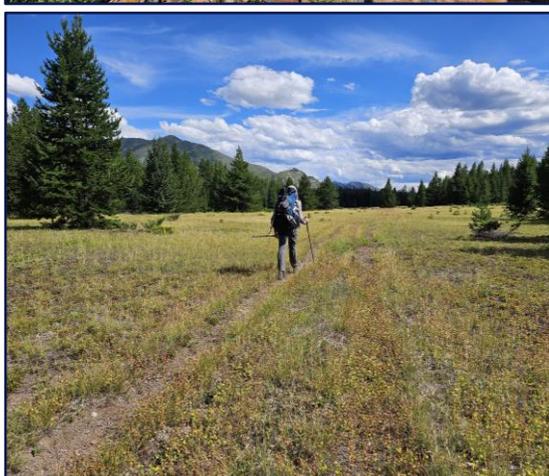
Mount Wam Lookout, located on the Ksanka Ranger District, is in the Ten Lakes Scenic Area and along the Pacific Northwest Trail. Built in 1931, it is one of the last gabled L-4 lookouts that sits atop a 7,121' peak in the Whitefish Range and was staffed as a fire lookout into the 1950s. This lookout is open to the public and often used as a shelter.

This summer's project focused on reroofing the lookout which took place in mid-August. The new cedar shingle roof was funded through the Great American Outdoors Act and installed by NMLA members: Mark Miller, Barb Hvizdak, Rory Trimbo, Steve Glow, and Chuck Manning. Several Forest Service employees also helped tackle this project and a huge thank you must go out to the Northwest Montana Back Country Horsemen who transported supplies and scaffolding back and forth to the jobsite.



Flathead National Forest

Mud Lake Lookout



The Mud Lake Lookout, on the Spotted Bear Ranger District, is in the Bob Marshall Wilderness east of Big Salmon Lake in the South Fork of the Flathead River drainage. The L-4 lookout was built in 1932, and was the site of a major NMLA restoration project from 2015 – 2018.

Our volunteer crew hiked into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, leaving from the Meadow Creek Trailhead. The first day they hiked 12 miles to the Black Bear Cabin. The second day they hiked 8 miles and stayed at the Salmon Forks Cabin. On the third day, they made it to Mud Lake – a 2.5-mile hike one way with lots of blowdown to navigate. This required a ford across the South Fork of the Flathead River in both directions. The team did the same route on the way back to the trailhead.

Thank you to Joe Schmidt, Katie Marsonette, and Kira Powell for committing five days to complete this assessment. This trip was done with backpacks as there was no stock support available.

In addition to completing the assessment, the crew also had packed in the needed paint/stain to put on the window glazing that was an outstanding need. The painting was completed!

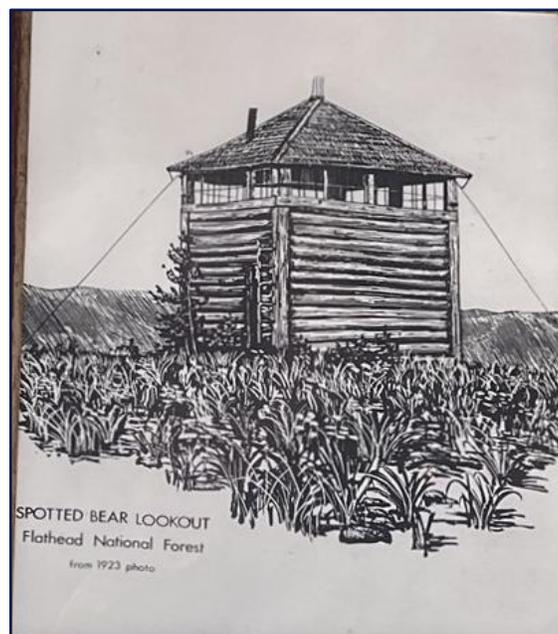
The crew enjoyed the wilderness experience, worked well together, had an enjoyable time overall and especially when some FWP folks joined in at Black Bear on night one with their engaging banter, and Kira shared her guitar and singing talents.

Spotted Bear Lookout

Spotted Bear Lookout started as a two-story log structure, built in 1916. It was replaced with the current treated timber R-6 tower in 1963. The lookout is reached by a 7-mile hike with 4100' elevation gain. It's a moderate hike till you reach the false summit. From there you can see the lookout, but you still have a bit of a trudge to reach the lookout site.

Spotted Bear lookout has been wrapped a few times for wildfire protection. These efforts are greatly appreciated so that the lookout has not been harmed by fires. NMLA volunteers identified many needs including window glazing, painting, some flooring, and potentially a new outhouse or stabilizing the existing outhouse. Two windowpanes need immediate replacement. Measurements were taken and new panes and glaze compound were delivered to Spotted Bear to be packed up and installed to better winterize the lookout.

Thanks to Greg Evans, Barb Hvizdak and Traute Parrie for completing this assessment.

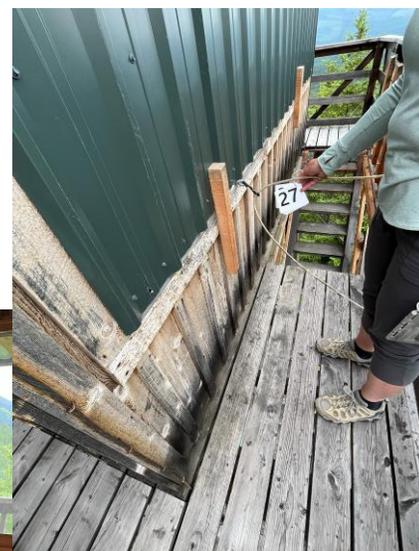


Montana DNRC

Little Napa Lookout

On June 13, volunteers Cathy Calloway, Doug Berglund, Barb Penner, Steve Penner and Beth Hodder joined forces with Montana Department of Natural Resources staff to do an assessment of Little Napa Lookout on the Swan Unit of DNRC.

Doug and Steve returned to visit this lookout where they volunteered on a major project in 2017, reconstructing the stairs and catwalk. This visit found the stairs, catwalk, cab and outhouse in good condition, and identified some areas for follow-up on the tower. A few maintenance items such as tightening hardware and some possible small additions were also identified.



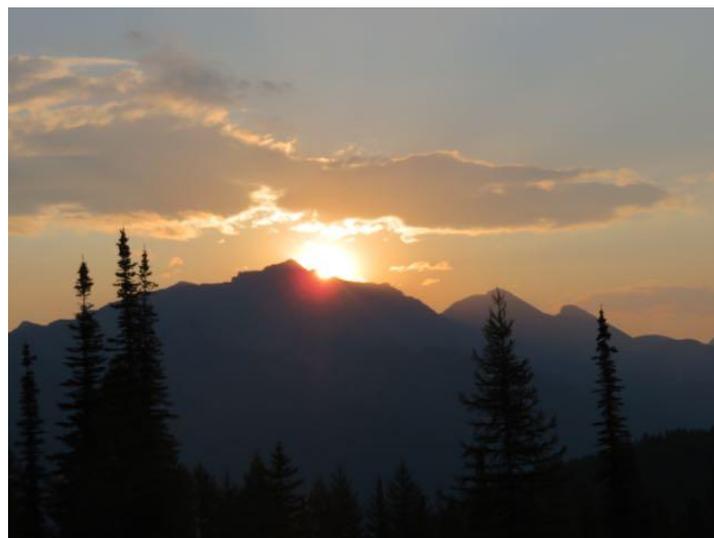


Beth at Firefighter Lookout

AMERICAN VOICES INTERVIEW

This Summer, Board Member Beth Hodder participated in an interview with Bill Bradley, former pro basketball player and New Jersey Senator, for *Sirius XM Radio Show American Voices*. Her episode is entitled **Living in Fire Lookouts in Montana**. It's a fun chat with someone who is amazed by the whole idea of fire lookouts!

[LISTEN HERE](#)



The Mad Bomber



Most of us love a scary story, and inevitably, while asking lookouts about their experiences, our oral history program team asks if they ever had any misadventures, either funny or frightening. Wolf ecologist, author, and veteran Flathead National Forest lookout Diane Boyd shared such a time.

During 1982, her first summer as a lookout, Diane took over the helm of Cyclone Lookout from her friend, Karen Reeves. Diane heard that “some guy who was a bit off in his head” said that he was going to blow up the woman in the lookout. He had evidently broken into a cabin below Cyclone on the North Fork Road, stolen a car, and was building a bomb. Later, word had it that they found pieces of his apparatus in the cabin and some bloody rags. “I think he injured himself, maybe blew his hand up or something.”

Diane remembers that she didn't know anything about it. But Dick Call, the Glacier View District Ranger back then, “who never talks to lookouts,” started calling her around eight o'clock at night and casually asking how she was, saying he was just going to check in with her every so often. Diane figured something was up but that Dick didn't want to tell her what it was.

One night when a storm was rolling in, Diane could see the lightning strikes. She wanted to stay up and watch it. “And then the winds come, and then the rain, and pretty soon it's hailing, and then Dick Call gets on the Forest Service radio, calls me and says, ‘so we want you to hike down.’ I said, ‘why?’ I said, ‘I'm in the middle of a thunderstorm.’

“Dick says, ‘Well, we think there might be a person on his way up there with intent to do harm.’ ‘Okay,’ that was as much as I knew at the time. So, he says, ‘We want you to hike down immediately. Just leave everything and hike down.’

“And so, in my mind, I thought, well, if there's somebody coming up the trail, I can't use a headlamp or flashlight, because they will see me, and I want to be hidden. And it was pitch black. It's a thunderstorm with marble-sized hail, and I clipped my leashes on my dogs, and they lead me down the trail because I can't see it. These dogs, you know, they can see everything. And I'm falling, I'm rolling on the marble (sized) hail, and I'm going down to the ground. They would stop and wait, and I'd get up.



Cyclone LO

“Make a long story short, I make it all the way down to the gate and pelted with hail. I'm soaking wet, I'm shivering, and there's nobody there, okay? And then I see headlights coming up the road. I'm like, so is this the Mad Bomber? Is this the sheriff they said they'd send for me? So anyway, turns out it was a sheriff, and so he let me and my two soaking wet dogs into his patrol car. He took me down to Big Creek, and he told me what was going on. That was the first time I really knew what was going on. And then I stayed down at Big Creek that night, and then the next day, I had to go back up on Cyclone again.

“And I don't know if they caught the guy. It had nothing to do with me. That was sort of—the Mad Bomber was going to come and blow me up at the lookout. So, I managed to thread that needle okay.”

Diane said she's sure the incident was 1982 because Karen Reeves was the lookout at Cyclone right before her. "I told her the story. She just laughed, because she's Karen. And she didn't know who he was, either, just some deranged guy. But I really believed for a little bit that I was going to be murdered on the trail on my way down. But I had my two big dogs. One of them weighed 110 and one 70 pounds, and they were tied to me by their leashes in the dark. And I thought, well, somebody wants to take us on—you go for it!"

This article by Beth Hodder is based on an interview that is part of the NMLA Oral History Project to preserve the stories associated with the lookouts (people and places) of Northwest Montana. This and other interviews will be archived at the University of Montana Library, and can be found online at <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/nwmt-ffla/>

SAVE THE DATES!



Lectures are at the FVCC Arts and Technology Building

WILDERNESS SPEAKER SERIES

One of the winter highlights is the popular Wilderness Speaker Series. Planning is still in the works. We will be a sponsor along with the Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation, Wild Montana Flathead-Kootenai Chapter, and the Natural Resources Conservation Management Program at Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC). For now, we can share the upcoming dates:

- ***February 10***
- ***March 10***
- ***April 14***

Stay tuned for more information as speakers are confirmed.

2025 COMMUNITY EVENTS

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION NIGHT



Werner LO Stay raffle winner Henry Roberts (right) with Board Member Pete Thomas

Backslope Brewing

COMMUNITY BENEFIT
APRIL 29TH, 2025
 TUESDAY • ALL DAY

107 9TH ST W (HWY 2), COLUMBIA FALLS, MT
 406-897-2850 | BACKSLOPEBREWING.COM

Join the Northwest Montana Lookout Association at Backslope Brewing to support a fundraising campaign for the restoration of fire lookouts located in northwest Montana.

Backslope pledges to donate a portion of their proceeds from all sales to Northwest Montana Lookout Association.

NMLA representatives will be present from 5 - 7 pm to answer questions and talk about lookouts.

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF FOREST FIRE LOOKOUTS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA
 WWW.NWMT-FFLA.ORG
 OR VISIT US ON FACEBOOK



Cabinet Mountain BREWING CO.
 205 MINERAL AVENUE IN DOWNTOWN LIBBY

BREWS FOR BENEFITS

SUPPORT THE RESTORATION of NW PEAK LOOKOUT

EVERY THURSDAY IN OCTOBER, 6-8 PM 2025

SPECIAL LIMITED EDITION GLASS AVAILABLE WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

CMBC PLEDGES TO DONATE \$1 OF EVERY BEER SOLD BETWEEN 6-8PM TO NORTHWEST MONTANA LOOKOUT ASSOCIATION

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF FOREST FIRE LOOKOUTS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA

This year we celebrate Northwest Peak Lookout located in northwest corner of Montana. Built in 1920, this lookout was a prototypical L-4 house and the forerunner to the classic L-4 model built throughout the west. Abandoned for fire detection in 1955, it has survived 98 harsh winters and once again is being restored to its original prominence. This summer's NMLA projects on the Kootenai National Forest also included work on Mount Wain and Big Creek Baldy lookouts.

WWW.NWMT-FFLA.ORG | OR VISIT US ON FACEBOOK

RAFFLE FUNDRAISERS GENERATED > \$550 FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

36th FAMILY FORESTRY EXPO
May 10, 2025
 9:00 am - 3:00 pm **FREE ADMISSION!**
 Enjoy a day outdoors! Have fun learning about our forests!
 www.familyforestryexpo.org

DEMONSTRATIONS AT 10:30 & 1:30
 Mule String Packing Showcase • Logging Equipment Operations • PWCC Logger Sports Team •

HANDS ON ACTIVITIES ALL DAY
 Cross-cut saw use and handling • Paper Making •

FOREST WALK
 Educational stations - learn about what lives in the forest and diverse uses of the forest

EXHIBIT TENT
FREE LOGGING CAMP LUNCH
 Served from 11:00 to 1:00

NO DOGS PLEASE

Forests - Landscapes of Many Uses
TRUMBULL CREEK EDUCATIONAL FOREST
 Trumbull Creek Educational Forest is located 2 miles north of the junction of US 2 & Montana 60, midway between Winifred and Columbia Falls



BREWERY FUNDRAISERS GENERATED \$1800 FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

Hemlock Moon Raffle winner Andrew Santeago

Reflections on a Trip to Mud Lake Lookout By Kira Powell

A trip into the Bob Marshall Wilderness lures us outdoorsy types with manifold attractions. The Wilderness provides visitors with both challenges and rewards in equal, if not randomly allotted measures. Each trip to the Wilderness offers different experiences and yet, due to Wilderness protection measures, the Wilderness maintains a feeling of untouched consistency with changes occurring only at a geological time scale.

Thanks to the establishment of the National Forest System, Gifford Pinchot's adherence to and advocacy of conservation policies, and the passing of the Wilderness Act on September 3, 1964, the 1.5 million contiguous acres of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex remain untouched by motorized and mechanized influences of modern times.

With today's Forest Service very much under the influence of modern times, I found myself looking backwards to the early history of the agency. Specifically, I was drawn to a book authored by Gifford Pinchot in 1914 called, "The Training of a Forester" and packed the small paperback with me on the five-day trip to Mud Lake lookout.



Pinchot writes that the nascent conservation policy is, “the application of foresight and common-sense to natural resources to insure the existence of the forest in the future, and, as far as practicable, the continued abundance of its service to mankind. ... It was foreseen from the beginning by those who were responsible for inaugurating the Conservation movement that...it is the key to national success.”

Those long-visioned early conservationists feel as present as ever, when sitting on the porch of backcountry Black Bear cabin on route to Mud Lake. Built in the 1930s as a Ranger Station but no longer staffed, the cabin remains a well-loved and frequently visited stopover for Wilderness crews.



In contrast, the Mud Lake lookout receives far fewer visitors. It does however provide an essential link in the chain of backcountry radio communication sites, as well as an excellent destination for those seeking an out-and-back side trip. Mud Lake lookout stands above 6,000' with views to the west of the South Fork Flathead River and Big Salmon Lake, and to the east, the striking mountain range of the Continental Divide above the White River.



Mud Lake lookout is an L4 built in 1932 and was once a part of an enormous network of staffed lookouts across the Wilderness and across the National Forests. Pinchot writes, “Each year the Forest Service men extinguished not less than three thousand fires”, many of which were located and extinguished by those who spent their summers in lookouts like Mud Lake.



The Northwest Montana Lookout Association's work trip up to Mud Lake lookout involved a hike through a west-facing burn scar that thankfully spared the Mud Lake lookout itself but serves as a poignant reminder of the historical context and value of these structures. The work crew navigated the challenges of hand-carrying everything we needed – special thanks to Joe for carrying the paint – and were rewarded with the unmeasurable and indescribable experience of contributing to the maintenance and longevity of a little piece of history, deep in the Wilderness.



As the Mud Lake crew enjoyed our well-earned lunch and splendid views in all directions, I began to wonder, how does one describe the value of Wilderness? Particularly to those who may not have had much experience with the truly wild places left in this country. The peace found in solitude, the majesty of the landscapes, the energizing clarity found in a simpler backcountry life. A trip to the Bob makes it easy to feel the value of conserving an untrammled Wilderness and, as Gifford Pinchot described it, “the abundance of its service to mankind”.

How did Werner Peak (and lookout) get its name?

Rudolph Joseph “Joe” Werner was born in southern Germany in 1854. He emigrated to the United States at age 15. By 1876, Rudolph had made his way west. According to his biography, he “came to Montana in 1876 and served under General George Crook through the Sioux war and took part in two engagements”. Joe told Giles Crane [a neighboring friend] that he got the wrong kind of discharge from the Army. When asked why, Joe said there was a Sergeant who was always picking on him, and one day he got tired of it and shot him. Giles asked Joe if he killed him and Joe said no, if he had, he wouldn't be here. Joe said they just discharged me and set me afoot on the prairie, and I was on my own.



In May 1881, Joe Werner worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad as a foreman on the construction of the 3,800-foot railroad tunnel under Mullan Pass, about 13 miles west of Helena.

He came to the Flathead in 1887. By 1900, Joe helped homestead at the head of Whitefish Lake, and eventually received 80 acres there. Joe Werner was known locally as Joe Bush. He was a renegade, and a real character. He earned the name Joe Bush because when asked who he was and where he lived, he would say, “I am Joe from the bush.” Joe trapped a lot of bear, martin and anything he could get, but bear was the big thing. They got \$10.00 for a grizzly hide, and \$5.00 for a black bear. It doesn't sound like very much, but when you know that those fellows working in the woods were working for \$40.00 a month and food, they would make a living at it.

An engineer who was doing survey work in the Upper Whitefish stayed with Joe. Joe packed their supplies around, and doing one thing and another. He said to Joe one day that he thought they ought to name a mountain after him. Joe evidently didn't object. Well, they went out in front of the house, set up a transit, and pointed it due north, and the mountain it fell on they called Werner Peak, and it is Werner Peak today. They just picked it at random.

Joe died in 1933. His Daily Inter Lake obituary said:

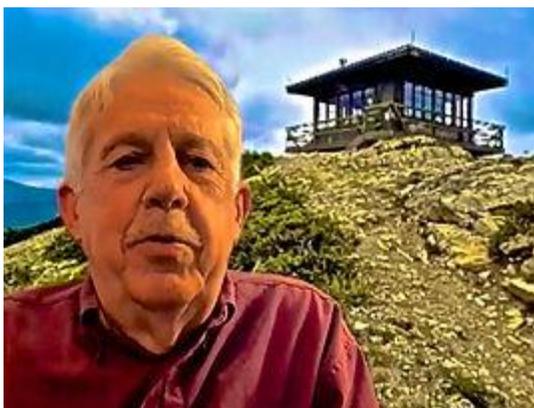
The body of Rudolph Joseph Werner, 80. former Indian fighter and trapper, who ended his life with poison after having given his guns to friends, was buried here today.... For 36 years he lived at the head of Whitefish Lake, earning his living by trapping and hunting until old age enfeebled him. He kept a string of pack horses and served as a hunters' guide for many years. Near the lake is an everlasting monument to the pioneer. It is a mountain named Werner's Peak.”

Thanks to Doug Berglund for researching and compiling a longer version of this tale. Sources included: Maurice Cusick's History of the Stillwater State Forest, census data, Joe's biography penned shortly before his death, and several obituaries.

ORAL HISTORIES UPDATE

Our volunteers continue to collect and archive stories from past and present fire lookouts who served in northwest Montana. To date we have documented 33 stories. All can be found from the [NMLA website](#), and the [U of M ScholarWorks](#) website. We have a couple more interviews that should appear in the near future.

A recent addition has been shortened interviews in a podcast format using AI generated summaries. Quite interesting. We hope this might help reach a broader audience. They can be found on Spotify and a variety of podcast platforms.



2026 PROJECTS



Planned projects for next year include:

- NW Peak LO – windows, shutters and siding, Helitack support
- Mt Wam LO – Finish up project, repair shutters and lightning protection
- Possible Stahl LO
- Assessments

NMLA

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