



# ON THE LOOKOUT

From the  
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Vienna, Virginia  
Summer 2007

## **ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH - AND A SMOKY VALLEY LOW!**

### **ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH!**

"Lookout Magic" was in the air as we gathered for our 2007 Western Summer Meeting at Seeley Lake, Montana. The weather was clear and comfortable with low humidity. Some of the locals grouched about the heat, but they obviously had not just flown in from hot, humid Washington DC where the heat index stays above a dripping 100 degrees for weeks, and a watery haze limits visibility to a few miles. To me the change was as welcome as the anticipation for the outstanding program that host Gary Weber and his committee had put together.

We were not disappointed. The speakers were excellent, the camaraderie special, and the field visits to lookouts were unparalleled. The most unique trip was to a former Blackfeet Fire Protection Association lookout now owned and staffed by the state. The visit was special because access is through several gates and not many folks get the visit the site. Saddle Mountain Lookout is a vintage L-4 cab still in original condition, even though it is 65 years old! Built in 1941 it is on a 20' pole tower that sways just the right amount for a vintage experience! The lookout will soon be added to the National Historic Lookout Register, and there is a possibility that FFLA will help with some needed restoration work.

### **SMOKY VALLEY LOW!**

After returning the Washington D.C. I came west again two weeks later, including a three-day visit to Missoula to meeting with the National Association of Forest Service Retirees. The weather was warm and dry and the winds up. It seemed that all of northern Idaho and western Montana was on fire. Every afternoon one could watch a

fire blow up, sometimes two or three. The air operations at the Forest Service's Aerial Fire Depot were at full throttle, with impressive turnaround times for both the Orion and Neptune air tankers. The DC-3 departed with jumpers twice that we saw.

After the meetings I drove out to the Mile Marker 124 fire on I-90 (6,000 acres). The following day I went up near Mineral Peak Lookout that FFLA is helping restore to observe a major run toward Seeley Lake of the Jocko Lakes fire just as the communities were being evacuated in the valley below. The run came very close to Double Arrow Lookout, now nearing completion of a two-year restoration project. Just weeks earlier the FFLA had gathered on the mountain to watch the sunset. The fire was stopped on the access road just below the tower.

### **THE LIGHTS GO ON AGAIN AT HIGH ROCK LOOKOUT**

Another highlight this year is the reopening of High Rock Lookout on the Cowlitz Valley Ranger District of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Located just south of Mt. Rainier and reached by a very scenic trail, this popular hiking destination was staffed for 17 years by FFLA member, and Packwood Chapter Chair Bud Panco. Left vacant for four years, the lookout was beginning to show signs of abandonment. It was staffed again this year, and repainted as well, through a partnership between the Forest Service and Historic Lookouts LLC of Virginia with support of FFLA members. For more information see [www.historiclookouts.com](http://www.historiclookouts.com). Nick Ferris of Olympia is leading the project and coordinating volunteers.

### **EQUINOX AT JUMPOFF LOOKOUT**

A final return to "Lookout Magic!" On returning to Portland from Missoula, I spent the night at Jumpoff Lookout on the Naches District of the Wenatchee National Forest. The lookout is a long way from anything with an extraordinary view. Also abandoned, but still in reasonable shape, the R-6 flat groundhouse with catwalk is on track to be a second partnership project with Historic Lookouts LLC. As the sun set that evening, it went down over the very peak of Mt. Rainier, a once-in-a-summer event! The air was still, the birds bidding each other good night, and a coyote howled. I savored every moment ..... THIS is why we do what we do!

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