Bear Basin Butte Lookout and Pierson Cabin

Smith River National Recreation Area
Six Rivers National Forest

A Room with a View

Are you seeking solitude, awe-inspiring views, a quiet haven away from crowds, or perhaps you've wondered what life would be like for a fire spotter in the Forest Service? While fire lookouts may be passing into history; they remain objects of interest for many people, both for their beautiful locations and the mystique surrounding existence in a high and remote site. Now you have an opportunity to feel for yourself what it's like to live in a fire lookout.

The Smith River National Recreation Area in the Six Rivers National Forest invites you to experience life at the top of Bear Basin Butte (elevation 5303') through rental of historic fire lookout and a new 1930's style cabin. The Lookout and Pierson Cabin, rented as a pair, may be reserved for one to four nights between July 1 and September 30, with reservations taken six months in advance for the current year. This guide describes the facilities and what to expect, recreation information, and reservation procedures.

The Facility and its Story

During the 1930s the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) participated in numerous construction projects in this part of California, building roads, campgrounds, and houses, including many Forest Service facilities in Gasquet and the Smith River NRA. In about 1926-27 the CCC participated in building the French Hill county road (County Road 411) which connected Gasquet and Big Flat. The Camp Six Lookout was constructed in about 1935 on the sixth location of the construction camp for French Hill Road. The lookout replaced an earlier one, moved one mile northwest to provide a better view into the Smith River canyon and the Gasquet Flat area. This lookout atop French Hill was part of US Forest Service fire detection operations through the 1990s.

Camp Six Lookout c: 1950

In the summer of 1996 the Camp Six Lookout was dismantled at its French Hill location and reconstructed the following summer on Bear Basin Butte at the site of another former lookout to provide Smith River NRA visitors a unique recreational opportunity: to spend the night in an authentic US Forest Service lookout. A new 1930s-style cabin, modeled after a CCC cabin design, was also constructed near the lookout. The project was accomplished through a partnership between Pierson Building Center of Eureka, CA, and the Six Rivers National Forest. The cab of the lookout was rehabilitated and the tower reduced from its former 30' height to rise six feet above the rock base.

Welcome to the Smith River National Recreation Area, located within the Six Rivers National Forest and managed by the Forest Service, United States Department of Agriculture. This 305,337-acre National Recreation Area (NRA) was designated by Congress in November 1990 to protect the area's special scenic value, natural diversity, cultural and historical attributes, wilderness, wildlife, fisheries, and the Smith River watershed's clean waters. The Forest Service has been designated as the steward of the NRA to provide recreational opportunities and to manage this diverse area for all of its valuable resources.

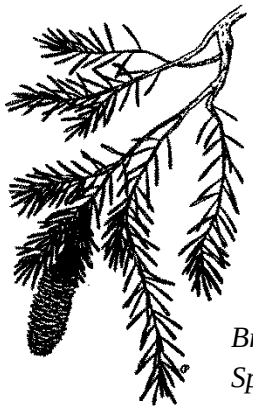
United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service
Pacific Southwest Region

Six Rivers National Forest

What to Expect:

An Incredible View. Bear Basin Butte is situated on a crest of a narrow mountain ridge, a treeless rock outcropping offering a 360 degree panorama. Imagine watching a sunrise or sunset, star-gazing, or even viewing an approaching storm from this magnificent vantage point! The mountain tops of the Siskiyou Wilderness area dominate the horizon to the east—Twin Peaks, Prescott Mountain, and Baldy Peak among others. Look for Sanger Peak, Broken Rib Mountain, and the meadow of High Dome in the north and Ship Mountain to the south. The Pacific Ocean lies to the west, a dramatic contrast to the lush forested mountainsides and valleys drained by the Smith River and its tributaries. Wisps of clouds or fog may move among the peaks and valleys, emphasizing the many contours of this striking landscape.



Brewer Spruce

A Botanical Area. The Butte itself sits within the unique and diverse Bear Basin Butte Botanical Area, home to over 14 species of conifers and an unusual and beautiful array of wildflowers and plants. In a few hours a visitor may see what otherwise would take days and miles of exploration. A booklet in the cabin will guide your discovery of this special area. Within the Smith River NRA are three additional Botanical Areas.

Watchable Wildlife. The Smith River National Recreation Area is home to more than 300 resident wildlife species; black bear, coyote, gray fox, deer, mountain lion, bobcat, mountain beaver, opossum, and quail plus many others. You may spot a migrating bald eagle or a Pacific fisher. Checklists and books in the cabin will help you identify your findings.

Trails. The Smith River NRA has over 75 miles of hiking trails, several of which take hikers to many additional miles of wilderness trails. The Doe Flat Trailhead is only three miles from the lookout. This trail provides access to Buck Lake, the Devil's Punchbowl, and the Clear Creek Recreational trail in the Siskiyou Wilderness. Pick up trail information at the visitor center.

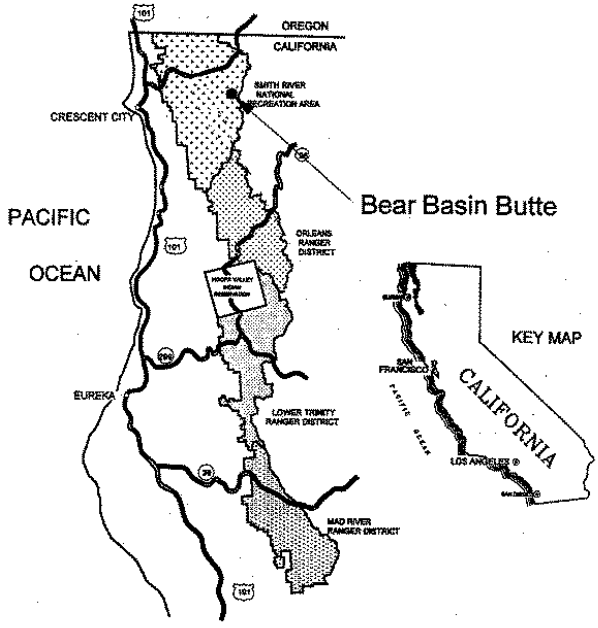
Wind, Sun, and Changing Weather.
Be aware that because the Butte offers incredible, open views, it also makes the site vulnerable to wind, sun, and extremes in weather. The weather at this elevation and this close to the ocean may change quickly and often. It may be sunny at Bear Basin Butte and raining in Gasquet and vice versa. Cool breezes coming off the ocean are common.

Hike to Island Lake in the Siskiyou Wilderness

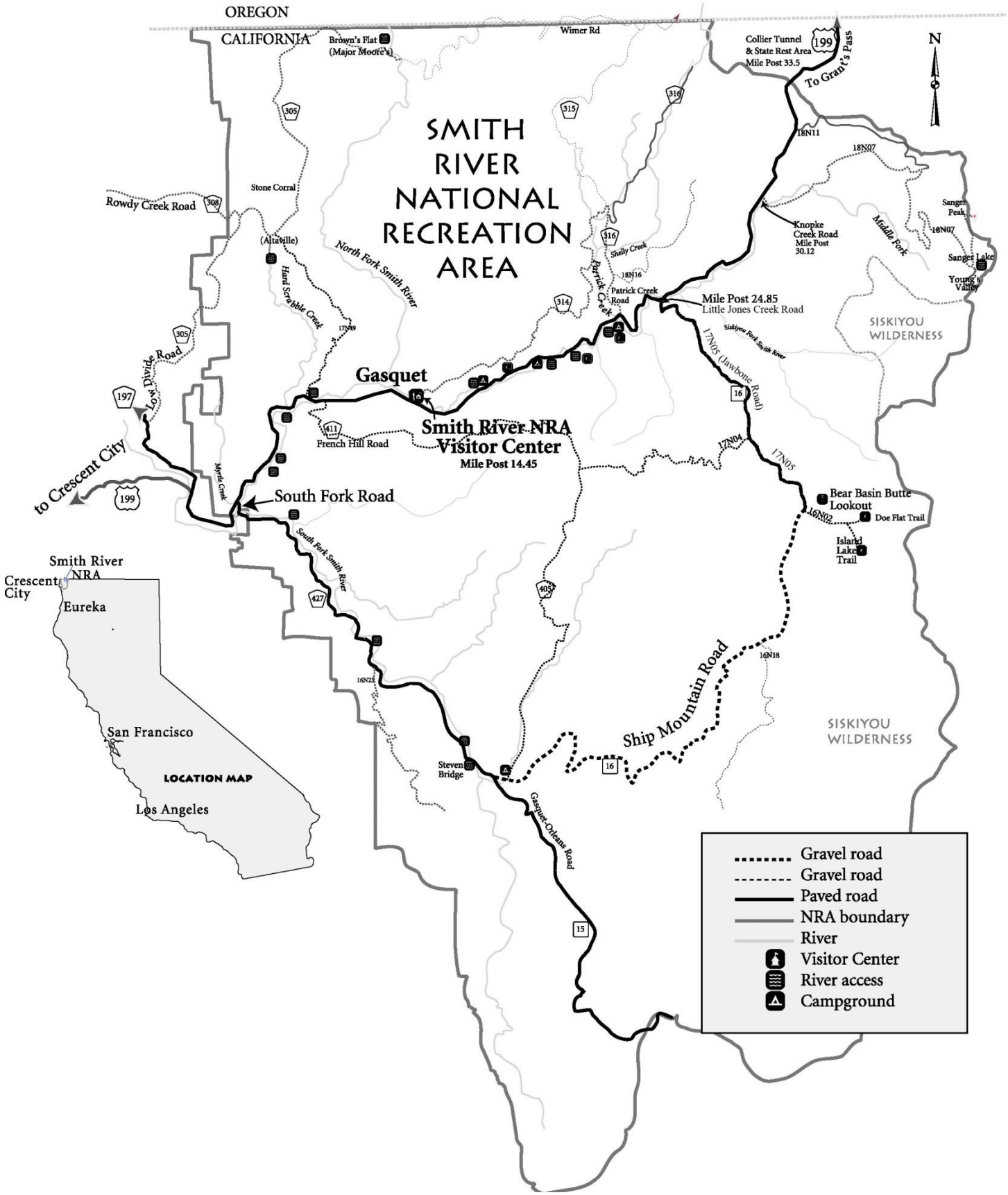
From the Lookout:
Nearest gas: Hiouchi Hamlet, 31 miles
Nearest grocery store: Crescent City, 40 miles; convenience store in Gasquet, 21.5 miles
Nearest potable water:
Patrick Creek Campground, 13 miles (summer)
Panther Flat Campground, 18 miles (open all year)
Nearest known pay telephone: Brookings, Oregon, 56 miles

Driving to Bear Basin Butte Lookout

- Distance from Smith River NRA Visitor Center: 21.5 miles
- Driving time: approximately 1 hour
- Directions from visitor center: Travel east on Hwy 199 10.6 miles (mile post 24.73) to Little Jones Creek Road (a.k.a. FS 16/17N05/Jawbone Rd). Follow signs to Bear Basin LO, staying on the paved road. About 5.8 miles up Jawbone you will have your first view of the lookout. At about 20.5 miles (10 miles on Jawbone), turn left onto 16N02 and continue to gate at 20.8, following sign to Bear Basin LO.
- Detailed Smith River NRA maps are available at the visitor center.



SIX RIVERS NATIONAL FOREST
Vicinity Map


OREGON
CALIFORNIA
SMITH RIVER NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
Brown's Flat (Major Moore's)
Wimer Rd
Collier Tunnel & State Rest Area Mile Post 33.5
To Grant's Pass
N
Stone Corral
Rowdy Creek Road
(Altaville)
Hard Scrabble Creek
North Fork Smith River
Shelly Creek
Patrick Creek
Patrick Creek Road
Knopke Creek Road Mile Post 30.12
Middle Fork
Sanger Peak
Sanger Lake
Young's Valley
Mile Post 24.85
Little Jones Creek Road
SISKIYOU WILDERNESS
Siskiyou Fork Smith River
17N05 (Jawbone Road)
Gasquet
Smith River NRA Visitor Center
Mile Post 14.45
French Hill Road
Low Divide Road
to Crescent City
Myrtle Creek
South Fork Road
South Fork Smith River
Bear Basin Butte Lookout
Doe Flat Trail
Island Lake Trail
Smith River NRA
Crescent City
Eureka
San Francisco
LOCATION MAP
Los Angeles
Ship Mountain Road
Steven Bridge
Gasquet-Orleans Road
Gravel road
Gravel road
Paved road
NRA boundary
River
Visitor Center
River access
Campground

Mountains Roads, No Maid Service, No Convenience Stores, And No Plumbing!

Think of a night on Bear Basin Butte as camping, except you won't need a tent. This is a primitive 1930's style cabin with no electricity, no water, no well, and no indoor plumbing.

- The site is 22 miles from the Smith River NRA Visitor Center, and over half the drive is on a single-lane, steep, winding mountain road.
- You may park close to the cabin, but the lookout is reached via a 250' uphill trail.
- The 20- x 30- foot cabin sits on a graveled level spot on a narrow ridge, with very steep drop-offs on two sides. Outside the cabin are three picnic tables, four Adirondack chairs, a fire ring, a wood shed, and an outhouse (vault toilet).
- The cabin has two rooms, one containing a wood-burning stove, bench, bookcase, small dining table with four chairs, and three double beds (one of which is a bunk above another).
- A large east window frames the Siskiyou Mountains; the remaining six windows are screened and may be opened to provide cross-ventilation.
- A second room has 18 feet of counter space and an open area for gear and supplies.
- A covered entry holds a supply of firewood.
- A broom, mop, carpet sweeper, and other cleaning supplies are provided. Guests are expected to clean the cabin and lookout before their departure, removing all garbage and food items. Visitors should leave the facility in the same—or better—condition as at their arrival.
- The lookout is situated at the apex of Bear Basin Butte, about 250' away from the cabin. A flight of stairs leads to the cab which is surrounded by a catwalk and railing. Windows line all four sides. The lookout has a table, double futon, bookcase, and chairs.
- The road leading to the cabin/lookout is gated and permit holders will receive a key to open it. The gate ensures some privacy, but occasional NRA visitors may hike in to see the view from Bear Basin Butte. Any drive-in visitors will be on official business.
- Accessibility—The privy and cabin are barrier-free and two picnic tables accommodate wheelchairs. The area surrounding the cabin is, however, graveled, not paved. The path to the lookout is steep and unpaved and there is no ramp to the lookout cab.

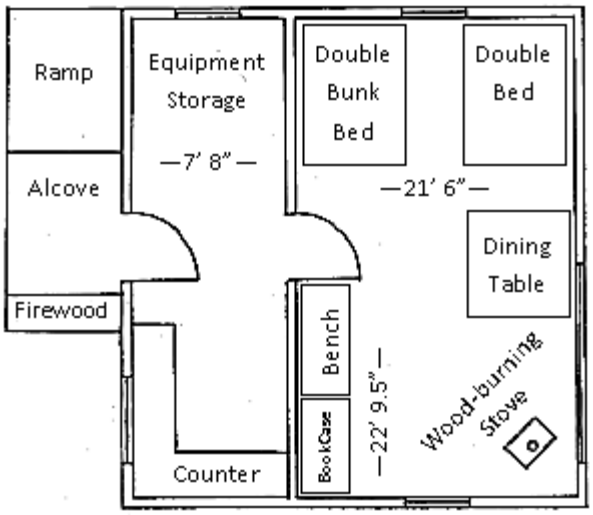
What to Bring:

Firewood is provided but cabin/lookout guests must "pack in and pack out" all other supplies including:

- **water** for drinking, cooking, cleanup
- food
- cooking stove and fuel
- lantern and fuel
- matches
- axe
- paper, kindling
- flashlight
- cooking and eating implements
- ice and cooler
- garbage bags to pack out trash
- sleeping gear
- extra clothing for warmth
- rain gear
- hats and sunscreen (remember, no shade trees)
- first aid equipment
- towels, soap
- toilet paper (also provided)
- personal hygiene supplies
- binoculars, camera, telescope*
- lawn chairs*
- topo map*
- permit and key
- common sense

*Nice to have but not necessities.

Imagine gazing out the 7-foot picture window, watching the sun hit the peaks of the the Siskiyou Mountains east of Bear Basin Butte.



Cabin Floor Plan

Reservation and Permit Procedures

- You can request a reservation by visiting the National Recreation Reservation Service website (Recreation.gov). Or, if you prefer, you can call the NRRS reservation center by dialing 1-877-444-6777 (toll free), to speak with one of their agents. The NRRS can also be contacted through TDD 1-877-833-6777 and International (518) 885-3639.
- The reservation season is from July 1 through September 30. Call the district office to inquire about availability in the off season. The lookout and Pierson cabin, rented as a pair, may be reserved for one to four nights.
- The rental rate is $75.00 per night for 1 to 8 persons; $5.00 for each additional person. The occupancy maximum is 12 persons. Interagency Senior/Access Pass or Golden Age/Access Passport discounts do not apply.
- Check in time is 2:00 p.m. Guests must pick up their permit and keys for the cabin and gate in person at the on the day of the reservation. The cabin/lookout may not be occupied without a permit in hand. The cabin must be vacated by 12:00 p.m. and all keys returned to the visitor center.
- Pets are not allowed in the cabin or lookout.

For more information please visit, call or write one of the Forest Service offices below. Office hours at Smith River National Recreation Area are Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. All Forest Service offices are wheelchair accessible.

Smith River National Recreation Area
10600 Highway 199/P.O. Box 228
Gasquet, CA 95543
707-457-3131 (also TTY#)

Six Rivers National Forest
1330 Bayshore Way
Eureka, CA 95501
707-442-1721 (also TTY#)

Photos of this facility are available on the Six Rivers National Forest web site, http://www.fs.usda.gov/srnf. From left sidebar go to: Recreation/Camping & Cabins/Cabin Rentals.

Revised 10/2014

Safety Factors

- Bear Country. Remember the name of the butte? This is their space too. Bears avoid humans as much as possible as long as we remember a few facts: never leave food or garbage outside the cabin. Make noise, whistle, and sing when hiking in the woods. If you encounter a bear, don't run; wave your hands and yell. Never approach a bear cub; walk away slowly and noisily.
- The cabin and lookout are not "child-proofed." The cliff edges are not fenced and railings on the lookout catwalk are at adult heights.
- Lightning storms are a part of the thrill of staying at a lookout, but they are also extremely dangerous. If a lightning storm should occur while you are at the lookout, follow these rules to minimize the danger: stay indoors or in your vehicle. If you are trapped outside during a lightning storm, move to lower ground and stay low to the ground, away from trees or other high objects. If you are in the lookout building, close windows and doors. Lightning follows air currents. Turn off radios and damper the stove. Do not touch anything metal. If you spot a fire while at the lookout, report it to the Smith River NRA Visitor Center as soon as possible.
- Use common sense! Rowdy behavior on the lookout catwalk or near cliff edges would be extremely dangerous. One should not sit or lean upon the deck railing. Use a flashlight when walking to the privy at night.
- Driving Forest roads: The 12.5 miles of Forest Service roads that take you to Bear Basin Butte are generally one lane roads with pullouts. Drive slowly, stay to the right side of the road at all times, and use pullouts. Above all, be alert and drive defensively.

Numerous US Forest Service staff, Pierson Construction employees, and individual volunteers have contributed countless hours and resources to make the lookout cabin on Bear Basin Butte a reality. With your vigilance and support this special spot may be enjoyed by visitors for many years to come. Thanks for caring.

All are Welcome

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.