

## Horn Mountain Fire Lookout Tower Restoration Project

The Forest Service is planning restoration work on the Horn Mountain Fire Lookout Tower due to safety concerns associated with improving communications and employee access to repair the antenna on the deteriorated fire tower.

The restoration work is planned to mitigate a new 2' x 2' 60 foot tall self-supporting telecommunications tower that is scheduled for placement about 15 meters from the 110 foot fire tower so the existing communications control room can be utilized. No part of the fire tower complex will be destroyed in the construction of the new tower although a few trees may be cut to aid in radio signal reception.

A mitigation plan to lessen impacts of the new tower to the National Register of Historic Places eligible site was crafted with input from the Alabama Historical Commission, CCC Legacy, and the Fire Tower Lookout Association (FFLA). Implementation of the plan will better document the historic 1930s and 1960s components of the site, as well as, provide funding for site maintenance that was deferred for the past several years. At a minimum this site mitigation plan will include:

- 1) Photo-documentation and scale line drawings of the tower and all remaining structures and structural foundations at a Historical American Building Survey (HABS)/Historical American Engineering Record (HAER) level.
- 2) A cooperative effort between the National Forests in Alabama (NFsAL) and FFLA will secure funding for a partial restoration of the original Horn Mountain Fire Tower starting with the refurbishment of the stair treads.
- 3) Further partial restoration of the fire tower site will be proper prep and repainting the fire tower, removing the unneeded antenna and cables and stabilizing the masonry overlooks.
- 4) To designate this site as a Passport in Time (PIT) project to record all aspects of the site and to give the public an opportunity to participate in the preservation of the fire tower and the site.
- 5) Begin the nomination process to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.
- 6) Develop interpretive signing explaining the importance of fire towers within the history of the U.S. Forest Service.
- 7) Prepare a short publication about the role of African American CCC enrollees and send it to a journal of popular history.

Passport in Time (PIT) is a volunteer archaeology and historic preservation program of the US Forest Service (FS). The Friends of the Talladega National Forest will be assisting with this project. Learn more about their volunteer efforts at <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfTheTalladegaNationalForest>.

The Talladega Ranger District would appreciate any assistance to complete this project. Contact Marcus Ridley, National Forests in Alabama Archaeologist and Section 106 Coordinator, at 334-241-8103 or Gloria Nielsen, Talladega District Ranger, at 256-362-2909 x121.

## Horn Mountain Fire Lookout Tower History

On July 17, 1936, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, by proclamation, created the Talladega National Forest. Just prior to this time, President Roosevelt revitalized the nation by setting in motion a “New Deal” for America. One of these New Deal programs was the Emergency Conservation Work Act, more commonly known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) which was signed on March 31, 1933. Alabama was fortunate to have several CCC camps. One of those camps provided an African-American junior enrollee company who constructed the Horn Mountain Fire Lookout Tower for the U.S. Forest Service from 1936-1938.

The fire tower is a 100 foot tall International Derrick & Equipment Company steel tower with a 7x7 steel cab. The tower was one of several 'ridgetop' fire towers erected by the CCC along the highest points of the mountain range throughout the extent of the Talladega National Forest. It was a key component of fire protection measures implemented to safeguard both the national forest and the 75 mile long Skyway Motor Way which began at Sylacauga and ended at Borden Springs.

### Timeline

- 1957 - Designated on the Forest's Recreation Plan as the Horn Mountain Recreation Area. According to that plan, infrastructure at the complex consisted of "...a picnic shelter, parking space, tables, fire places, toilets and foot trails.
- 1963 - Five picnic tables, two concrete benches and a well were added.
- 1964- The water supply was upgraded along with the addition of a fieldstone encased drinking fountain connected to the well dug in 1963. The overlooks were clad in fieldstone.
- 1969 - The lookout's dwelling was sold and removed from the complex since it was not old enough to be considered a significant historical site.
- 1979 - An eight foot by eight foot communications control room was constructed adjacent to the fire tower and antenna were placed on the tower. Shortly thereafter a chain-link fence was constructed around the tower to prevent the public from climbing the tower.
- 1997 - In lieu of building a new telecommunications tower on the fire tower site, an agreement was made with Alabama SHPO, interested tribes, other interested parties, and the National Forests in Alabama to place additional communication antennas on the fire tower.
- 1997-current -The condition of the fire tower and the surrounding area has deteriorated over time. The wooden steps on the tower have not been replaced in several years, deferred due to budget constraints. The floor of the cab and the two bottom stair sections were removed to discourage visitor use. Extant structures still associated with the Horn Mountain Fire Tower complex include dilapidated men's and women's toilets, a picnic shelter constructed in 1957 (refurbished in 2005 by the Timber Framers Guild), some damaged picnic tables, damaged water fountain, several fieldstone masonry overlooks on the western face of Horn Mountain, and the foundation for the lookout's dwelling. The antennas and cables are currently in use on the fire tower.