



Flathead National Forest

Media Release

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Short Documentary Profiles Forest Service Fire Lookout

KALISPELL, MT - A short documentary, *The Lookout*, which shows a day in the life of a fire lookout, has been gaining attention and awards at film festivals around the country, including the top prize (Big Sky Award) at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival held recently in Missoula. *The Lookout* follows Flathead National Forest employee Leif Haugen as he goes about the day-to-day business of scanning the forest for signs of fire.

New York filmmaker Brian Bolster says he was backpacking through Glacier National Park when he first encountered both a fire lookout and the individual staffing that particular lookout. The lookout's job left an indelible impression on him, and he decided to capture and profile the remote and solitary lifestyle of a lookout as well as understand his or her role in fire management.

The fire lookout program on the Flathead National Forest consists of 4 annually staffed lookouts and several others staffed on an as-needed basis. These lookouts provide daily and continuous visual observations of existing and potential fires, overlapping with lookouts in Glacier National Park. The lookout staff is one of the first resources to observe new fires as they evolve. They usually perform 10 day hitches typically from June through September. Most of the lookouts were built between the 1930s and 1970s and require ongoing maintenance and restoration to keep them operational.

The short film was shot over six days and five nights and follows Haugen as he performs his daily duties as a fire lookout at the Thoma Lookout a few miles from the Canadian border in the North Fork area. Filmmaker Brian Bolster says "I had a hunch that lookouts have a special connection to not only the environment around them, but also to the structure in which they live and work. As I was shooting this project, I quickly learned that fire lookouts and the individuals that staff them are an important part of our nation's history, and I really wanted to showcase their work to audiences who may not be familiar with their unique, yet often times unnoticed, role in fire management."

Satellites, GPS, computer applications and other technology provide new tools for fire lookouts, but technology cannot replace the people. Lookout Leif Haugen says, "Fire lookouts are the quietest aspect of fire management, and many people may think we don't staff them anymore. I hope this film helps to show that the lookout program is strong and well used in the fire management program, especially in the Flathead area. I'm very proud that my lookout friends, despite all having very different experiences based on the variety of settings they work in, have seen it and feel that the film does a good of capturing the day in the life of a lookout experience."

The Lookout is currently screening at various film festivals around the country. For more information and updates on the film, you can check out the film's movie page on Facebook at [Facebook.com/TheLookoutMovie.com](https://www.facebook.com/TheLookoutMovie.com) or email Brian Bolster at briansbolster@me.com.

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