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LONG PAST SUMMER 2017

# LOOKOUT NETWORK

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- *FFLA Board Meeting January 13, 2018*
- *Lookout Restorations Completed*
- *New York Centennial Celebrations*

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# Big Hole Peak Lookout Project Completed

After five years - one more than planned - the project to restore the Big Hole Peak Lookout on Lolo National Forest near Plains, MT was wrapped up in late June. The project has been a collective effort between the Lolo NF, Passport in Time (PIT) volunteers, and the local Wild Horse Plains Chapter of the Back Country Horsemen (BCH).

The Big Hole Lookout PIT project has a long history. In the 1990s, the lookout, one of only three of that design remaining in the region, was recognized by the Forest as a site that was in need of historic restoration so that it could be preserved for future generations. Other Forest Heritage priority projects put the restoration work on hold for over a decade. In 2005, attention shifted back



to Big Hole Lookout when local volunteers expressed an interest in seeing the lookout restored. The Forest Service Region 1 Historic Preservation Team -- lead by Kirby Matthew -- assessed the building once again, and a document was produced that detailed the work needed.

In 2012, with significant support from the local BCH chapter, Big Hole became a restoration priority. That year, the Lolo National Forest submitted for a Heritage Stewardship Enhancement (HSE) grant, which then gained support from the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team. The Wild Horse Plains BCH also successfully submitted a grant request to the Sanders County Resource Advisory Council (RAC). Combined, the grants totaled \$35,000.

In 2013, the project was off and running with the purchasing of supplies: replacement cedar shingles, a new replacement wood stove, materials for the outhouse, the safe removal of pack rat droppings, and a new lightning protection system. The funding also supported six volunteers in a Passport in Time project. The PIT volunteers committed 400 hours at the site along with two members of the Historic Preservation Team, one cook, and pack support from the Region 1 Pack String as well as the Ninemile Pack String. Daily support was on hand from the Wild

Horse Plains Back Country Horsemen, whose members delivered fresh water and supplies. Those members also repaired the decrepit outhouse. When the



volunteers left, Wild Horse Plains BCH had removed 19 windows and hauled them down the mountain to be repaired over the winter.

In 2014, Wild Horse Plains BCH, received another Sanders County RAC grant and the Lolo NF received another HSE grant for a combined total of \$22,000 for the year's supplies and work needed. Over the winter, nineteen windows were repaired and re-glazed in the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team wood shop. A variety of logs for the complicated restoration work were needed to match logs to be replaced or repaired at the lookout. The Forest and the BCH cut and peeled over 20 logs that could be used in



the wall replacement. The employees were also supported by the Region 1 Pack String. Even though it rained the entire first week, all nineteen windows were painted - three coats of dark green and four coats of white. The north wall, which sits precariously close to the steep cliff, had two logs replaced and two logs repaired. Measurements were taken of the furniture to start building replica furniture in the Historic Preservation Team wood shop over the following winter. A shutter was also replaced to get a design for the following year. In 2014, seven PIT volunteers dedicated a total of 384 hours, while the local Back Country Horseman committed an additional 412 hours.

In 2015, the Lolo National Forest, with support from the Wild Horse Plains BCH, Region 1 Historic Preservation

Team, Region 1 Pack String, Bitterroot National Forest Pack String, Idaho Panhandle NFs, Bonners Ferry Pack string, and Sanders County Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), made great strides in the restoration work at Big Hole Lookout. Fair weather helped keep the project moving. With only four PIT volunteers, 314 donated hours of work were accomplished at the site. Wild Horse Plains BCH contributed over 500 hours with daily support carrying water and paint. The volunteers completed the final south wall repair and restoration in 2015. The Sanders County YCC painted the



lumber for gables and shutters. Once this was completed the old gables and shutters were removed and replaced. The Wild Horse Plains BCH painted the interior walls as well as the exterior log walls.

In 2016, work was completed in the Historic Preservation Team shop on replica furniture. This was going to be the year to "get it done" with a two-week PIT project. In the first week, the building walls were straightened so they no longer listed. The old ceiling was replaced with an in-kind ceiling. The floor was removed and



a new subfloor was also installed and reinforced with galvanized wire on both top and bottom so that rats will not be able to enter the lookout from below. The furniture was reconstructed, and mostly painted. Then on Day 7 of the project, smoke from the Copper King Fire appeared; within a half hour, the group was advised to





evacuate the lookout immediately, given the winds and the fast-moving wildfire. It was disappointing to be so close to finishing, but having to leave work undone - two or three days of work to finish the floor, complete the painting and daubing, install the door, and level the lookout. The following day, project leader Erika Karuzas and several firefighters were flown in to cover the lookout with structure



protection wrap. It was initially thought that Lolo personnel would return after the fire and finish the project, but it not until mid-September that the lookout was able to be unwrapped.

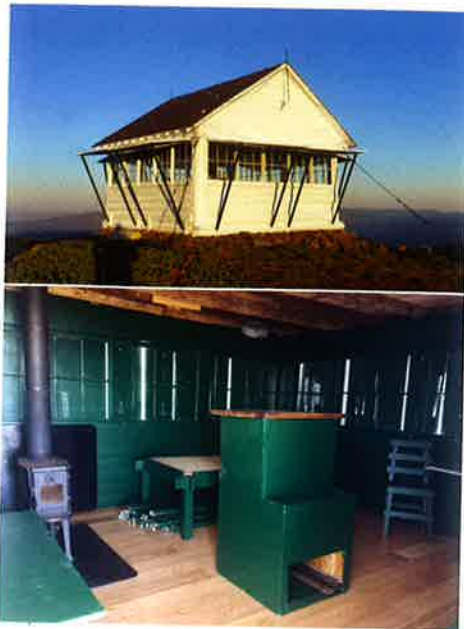
In 2017, plans were made to get in early to finish up, before fire season (and Erika's maternity leave). The Plains-Thompson Falls Ranger District hosted the final PIT project at Big Hole starting



on June 20th, again with support from Wild Horse Plains BCH. The project was scheduled to go two weeks, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on the 27th. Plans once again changed when the work was completed early, the volunteers had left the mountain, and the tools and gear were flown off by the 25th. Rather than waiting and holding the ceremony without them, the impromptu ribbon-cutting took place while the volunteers were still there.



Long Past Summer 2017



Plans are for the lookout to become part of the Cabin Rental Program.

FFLA member (and retired Lolo NF employee) Libby Langston has been contracted to produce the final video of the project completion; she had previously produced videos of each year's project.

Highlights of the project included the participation of two former Big Hole lookouts, Molly Morrison and Chad Kinzel. Molly (below) was the last to staff the lookout, in 1970-71, and became a frequent visitor during the project. Chad staffed Big Hole in 1966 and was a PIT volunteer for the last two sessions.



## In the Sun

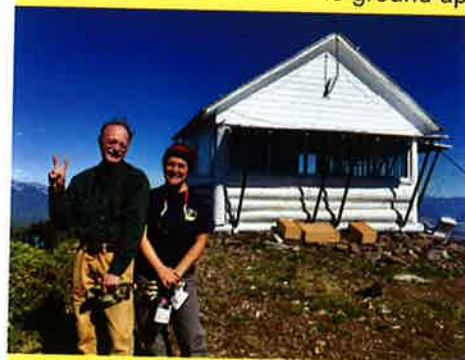
by Kaeli Wells, June 23, 2017

I hiked down off the mountain at 3:44 in the morning. It was the day after the summer solstice and there was already a thin line of light blue along the horizon. I moved quickly and carefully down the trail, guided by my headlamp and the downhill movement of gravity. I stopped suddenly, pulled by an invisible force in the darkness. I looked up at the stars, twinkling in their own magic, then realized what caught my attention. Not so far away was a scraggly, uneven peak, waiting patiently for the sun to rise. And on top of that peak stood a small wooden

structure. The lookout was slightly less patient than the mountain, only because the mountain was a little older. We existed in that moment, the land, the lookout, and I, hidden between the dark sky and the quiet.

When I write about the Big Hole lookout, it's like being a child with a hidden secret, mostly because I feel incredibly young. Recently I met Chad Kinzel, a man who started working as a fire lookout before I was born. There's an old picture of him standing out in front of the lookout. He's incredibly tan, with a head full of shiny brown hair. He was 23 years old when the photo was taken - that was over 50 years ago. Ironically, I just turned 23 years old and started my first Forest Service job. Maybe if we were born in the same year, we could have been great friends. We tend to forget that we were all the same age once, and not so different. Time acts as a very interesting form of distance.

Chad was stationed at the lookout back in 1966, when it was only 36 years old. Since then, 51 years have passed and the structure appears almost identical, if not better than it did before. Imagine some of the most dedicated planners, craftsmen, and volunteers you've ever met and now imagine them all working on the same project. The folks from Passport in Time and the local Back Country Horsemen of Montana group restored the lookout from the ground up.



On the evening of the summer solstice, I made a point to go up to the lookout to say goodbye. I hiked up from our camp, following the path around pine trees and fading sunlight. As I came out on top of the mountain, the lookout appeared. It was a thing of beauty, sitting on top of its own little world with a fresh coat of white paint. Very proud. Very humble. I sat quietly on the ground, faced the sun, and made my peace with the world. The grass moved, caught in the waves of a breeze. We sat there together - the lookout and I. From there we could see the world stretching out in all directions.