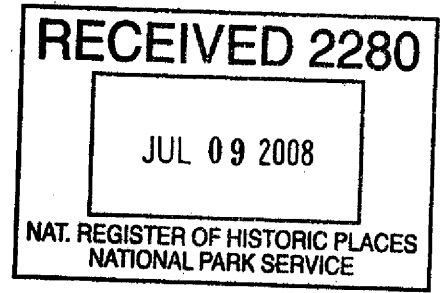


790



**United States Department of Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
other names/site number Forest Service CRIF No. 09-06-04-148; Mountain Lookout Station

2. Location

street & number Forest Service Road 2335 (Tower Road) Lakewood Ranger District, N/A **not for publication**
Nicolet National Forest
city or town Town of Riverview N/A **vicinity**
state Wisconsin **code** WI **county** Oconto **code** 083 **zip code** 54149

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets / does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title *Christy Ede* Deputy Forest Supervisor Date
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest
State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets / does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title *Michael J. Stevens*
State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

Date *6/27/08*

State or Federal agency and bureau

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower

Oconto County

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)

Edson H. Beall

8-19-08

Jan

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)	
		contributing	noncontributing
private	building(s)		
public-local	district		buildings
public-State	1 structure		sites
x public-Federal	site	1	structures
	object		objects
		1	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources
is previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
GOVERNMENT/fire station

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
RECREATION/Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Fire Lookout Tower

Foundation CONCRETE
walls Steel

roof steel
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Name of Property

Oconto County
County and State

Wisconsin

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

CONSERVATION
GOVERNMENT

Period of Significance

1935-1958 (CONSERVATION)
1935-1941 (GOVERNMENT)

Significant Dates

1935

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Aermotor Company

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Name of Property

Oconto County
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State Agency
 - Federal Agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository:
Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one _____

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 385000 5007720
 Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
 Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
 Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
 Zone Easting Northing

See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Elizabeth Miller (Miller revised draft by Kim Potaracke, USDA Forest Service, and subcontracted to)	date	March 15, 2008
organization	Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group, Inc.	telephone	608-233-5942
street & number	4033 Tokay Blvd	zip code	53711
city or town	Madison	state	WI

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Name of Property

Oconto County
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	Forest Supervisor	date	March 15, 2008
organization	USDA Forest Service, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest	telephone	715-362-1361
street&number	68 South Stevens Street	zip code	54501
city or town	Rhinelanders	state	WI

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
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Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

INTRODUCTION

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is situated in the Northeast $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Northwest $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 35, in the western portion of Riverview Township (Town 32 North, Range 16 East), two miles north of the community of Mountain in Oconto County, Wisconsin. It stands on land administered by the USDA Forest Service, in the Lakewood-Laona Ranger District of the Nicolet National Forest (presently known as the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest). The tower is the lone contributing structure (see attached figure, "Mountain Tower Site Plan: 2008"). The tower is a galvanized steel structure resting on four concrete piers (see photo 1). An interior stairway rises through the center of the tower to the lookout, or cab, at the top. Prefabricated by the Aermotor Company in 1932, the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower was initially erected by the Wisconsin Conservation Commission (WCC) at another location in the Nicolet National Forest.¹ In 1935, the Civilian Conservation Corps disassembled the tower and constructed it on its current site.² The period of significance begins with the tower's move to its current location. A privy was dug just north of the tower at about the same time, but no evidence of it has been discovered. Foundations and pits found 350 feet northwest of the tower are all that remain of the tower attendant's dwelling, garage/woodshed, well, privy, and garbage middens. These resources have not been evaluated for archaeological significance and lie outside the historic boundary of the tower.

DESCRIPTION

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower stands at the terminus of Forest Road 2335 (Tower Road), just east of Forest Road 2106 (Old State Highway 32), on the highest point in a hilly area in the Nicolet National Forest (see photo 2). A gravel road runs uphill from Forest Road 2106 and terminates in a gravel parking area north of the tower; both were in place by 1938. The parking lot is located within the historic boundary, but is not counted for the purposes of this nomination.

The elevation of the tower's cab at 1,380 feet gives it an unobstructed view of miles of surrounding forest. The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower was originally located about two and one-half miles east-

¹ "Assembly 7-foot x 7-foot Lookout Tower-Stairway Type MC-39," Aermotor Company, 29 October 1932, Mountain Tower folder, USDA Forest Service, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Supervisor's Records, Rhinelander, Wisconsin.

² "Foundation Layout for 7-foot x 7-foot Lookout Tower, Stairway Type MC-39," Aermotor Company, 8 December 1934; and "Woodwork for 99'-9" MC-39 Observation Tower," Aermotor Company, 2 February 1935; both in Mountain Tower folder.

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Section 7 Page 2

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

southeast of its current location, in the Southwest $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Southwest $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 32 in T32N, R17E (Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin). The four rubble piers on which the tower rested remain. The southwest pier is inscribed with the date 10/22/32. The isolated location of the original site, distant from roads and accessible only by a foot trail, prompted the tower's relocation. The USDA Forest Service purchased the current site from the Holt Lumber Company on 17 January 1935.³

The tower is an Aermotor model LS-40.⁴ The four concrete piers describe a square that measures about 19 feet on each side. The steel structure consists of stacking, tapering segments, that diminish in size and height as the tower rises some 93 feet, from the 19-foot square base, to the 7-foot square segment immediately beneath the cab (see photo 3). Each segment consists of four panels, each with parallel top and bottom chords, and two vertical members framing a pair of diagonal braces that form an X, like a Pratt truss. Intermediate horizontal struts stiffen each panel. The segments are bolted together, and the base of the structure is bolted into the concrete piers using five-foot anchor rods. The dogleg stairway climbs nine flights from a concrete foundation to an opening in the floor of the cab. The opening originally held a trap door (gone). The stairway has wooden treads and landings, open risers, and stringers and handrails of galvanized steel.

The cab measures seven feet square and about seven feet high. It is clad with galvanized sheet metal and capped with a pyramidal roof of galvanized steel. Originally, a pair of broad, multi-pane, steel windows formed a wall of continuous glass on each face of the tower. The glass is not extant, but the steel frames remain. Inside the cabin is pine board flooring. In 1977, a radio antenna was mounted on top of the tower by the Oconto County City Ambulance and Law Enforcement Committee. The same year, the Oconto County City Ambulance and Law Enforcement Committee erected a radio relay shelter building at the base of the tower.⁵ The antenna and the radio relay shelter building were removed in 1993 or 1994.⁶

In 1936, a cabin was built for the tower attendant at the foot of the slope below the tower, adjacent to Forest Service Road 2106 (see attached figures, "USDA Forest Service Improvement Plan, Mountain Tower Site, 1935-38," and "USDA Forest Service Improvement Plan, Mountain Tower Site, 1935-38, Tower Attendant's Dwelling and Support Structures").⁷ A garage/woodshed, a latrine, a garbage pit, a

³ Oconto County Deeds, 153:204, 17 January 1935, Mountain Tower folder.

⁴ *Forest Service Towers*, catalog of the Aermotor Company, Chicago, Illinois, no date, Mountain Tower folder.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ G.K. Fenger, Assistant Regional Forester, to Forest Supervisor, Nicolet National Forest, 9 January

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

cistern, and a well were also installed sometime between 1936 and 1938.⁸ A second garbage pit was later added. The cabin is believed to have been a two-room dwelling, eventually expanded to three rooms. The garage/woodshed and the cabin were removed between 1950 and 1955. The cabin survives as part of the Tailgate Restaurant in the community of Mountain. The latrine was still standing, although damaged, as late as 1960, but is no longer extant. All that remains of the well is a concrete slab with iron pipes that served as a footing for the water pump. The 1936-1938 improvements included a gravel roadway (Forest Service Road 2335) leading up to the tower, the gravel parking area, and a privy just north of the tower, gravel walkways adjacent to the tower attendant's dwelling, and many shrubs and trees.⁹ These resources have not been included within the historic boundary of the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower for several reasons. First, there are no extant above-ground resources, only foundations and pits remain. Second, most of the resources lie 350 feet away from the tower. Finally, they represent support structures, either for the tower attendant or providing access to the site, and were ancillary to the primary purpose of the tower, which was spotting fires. The archaeological significance of these resources has not been evaluated.

ALTERATIONS

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower itself retains excellent integrity. While the privy adjacent to the tower, the cabin, garage/woodshed and associated structures would have provided a more complete picture of the life of a tower attendant, as ancillary structures, their loss does not detract from the tower's ability to convey its historic role as an observation tower for spotting and responding to forest fires. In 1993-94, the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower was rehabilitated as an interpretive site. At that time, deteriorated wooden components of the tower were replaced, and additional steel bracing and rails were added to the tower to ensure public safety. Six interpretive panels were placed at the base of the tower, and Forest Service Road 2335 and the adjacent gravel parking lot were re-graded. Split rail fencing was added to funnel traffic to the tower, and a picnic table was also installed. These alterations are minimal and do not impair the excellent integrity of the tower. They do improve the

1941, Mountain Tower folder.

⁸ Leslie S. Bean, Assistant Regional Forester to Forest Supervisor, Nicolet, 29 January 1938, states, "...all of the improvements are in excepting the landscape planting...", Mountain Tower folder.

⁹ Records, Mountain Tower folder.

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National Park Service

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

accessibility and safety of the site, and help visitors understand the history of fire protection and suppression in the Nicolet National Forest.

___ End of Description of Physical Appearance

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Section 8 Page 1

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

___ Insert Statement of Significance

SUMMARY

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is eligible for the National Register under *Criterion A*, at the local level, in the area of Conservation. It represents the cooperative effort of the USDA Forest Service and the Wisconsin Conservation Commission (now the Department of Natural Resources) to protect northern Wisconsin's timber resources from the ravages of fire. The two agencies developed a fire detection and suppression program to preserve the remaining forested areas left undisturbed by logging and protect woodland restoration projects. The fire lookout tower served as the central link in the fire detection system. Constructed on the highest points in an area, fire lookout towers were distributed so as to form a network from which the entire landscape could be kept under surveillance, the towers assisted in early detection of fire outbreaks. During daylight hours from May through September, trained fire spotters kept constant watch over the surrounding area from the cab at the top of the tower, and reported outbreaks by telephone to a central station that directed the fire suppression effort. This resource type was first erected in Wisconsin between 1923 and 1927, when the Wisconsin state legislature created its first state fire districts. The subsequent establishment of the National Forest Service-administered forest regions and the Nicolet National Forest in 1933 created new areas that needed fire protection towers. The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is one of two remaining towers out of the 19 that once served the Nicolet National Forest. Fire lookout towers remained the prime method of fire detection in the Nicolet National Forest into the 1960s. The last fire called in from the Mountain Tower occurred on 25 April 1970.¹⁰ The period of significance in Conservation, therefore, extends from 1935 until 1958, the fifty-year cut-off date.

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is also locally significant in the area of Government, as one of the last remaining structures associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in the Nicolet National Forest. The CCC was a part of the first successful nation-wide relief program devised by the U.S. government. During the Depression years, the CCC was a major presence in the state and national forests of Wisconsin, and its men (and a few women) provided much of the physical labor that was associated with fire protection in these forests during this period. For instance, a local CCC camp is believed to have supplied the labor that was used to dismantle the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower and move it to its present site in 1935. Camp enrollees also manned the tower, and fought fires in the area.¹¹ Many other sites and structures associated with CCC activity in this forest are no longer

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Marvin P. Heisler, former enrollee of Mountain CCC Camp, who staffed the tower in 1940 and

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

standing, leaving the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower as one the last remnants of this historically important effort. Although it is uncertain when the Mountain CCC camp closed, it was assigned fire-fighting duties in the area through at least 1941, and may have built the structures for the tower attendant in 1936-38. Therefore, the period of significance in Government spans 1935 to 1941.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: OCONTO COUNTY AND RIVERVIEW TOWNSHIP

The potential for lumbering presented by the vast stands of timber and abundant lakes and rivers of Oconto County drew European-Americans as early as 1825. The first sawmill in what would become Oconto County was erected on the Pensaukee River, on the site of the present-day community of Pensaukee, near the shores of Green Bay.¹² A few sawmills followed on major rivers in the southeastern part of Oconto County, at what are now the city of Oconto (1845), the city of Oconto Falls (1846), and the village of Stiles (1852). When Oconto County was organized in 1851, its boundaries incorporated a large area of northeastern Wisconsin. Reduced over time, the current boundaries of Oconto County were finalized in 1885.¹³

The first logging camps in present-day Riverview Township, which is situated in the northern part of Oconto County, were established around 1861.¹⁴ By the 1870s, a logging trail known as the North Branch Road had developed parallel to the North Branch of the Oconto River, running northwesterly through the northern part of the county. Both State Highway 32 and the Chicago & North Western Railway would eventually follow roughly the same route. In 1877, Thomas McAllen and his family became the first European-American, year-round residents of the area. The community of Mountain was founded in 1886 with arrival of A.C. Frost, who built a hotel along the North Branch Road. Frost applied for a post office for the settlement, which was granted in 1889.¹⁵ The Town of Armstrong, which included current Riverview Township until 1922, was organized in 1891. The Wisconsin Northern Railroad (later a part of the Chicago & North Western Railway system) built a track through Mountain in 1896. By 1897, Mountain had a store, a depot, a hotel, and an ice cream parlor all placed

1941, interview with Kim Potaracke, Archaeological Technician, USDA Forest Service, Lakewood, Wisconsin, 4 February 2008.

¹² *History of Northern Wisconsin*, (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881), p. 655.

¹³ William Benjamin Henry, "The History of Oconto County," (Bachelor's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1921), pp. 10 and 14, 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁵ Bette Elbe, editor, *Mountain Memories, Mountain Centennial, 1889-1989*, (Mountain, Wisconsin: N. p., 1989), p. 5.

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

along the railroad tracks. A school, a blacksmith shop, saloons, a boarding house and residences were erected nearby. In early twentieth century, two churches were erected. A telephone exchange was established in 1914, the same year the high school opened.¹⁶

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the Holt Lumber Company owned thousands of acres in northern Oconto County, including in the vicinity of Mountain. D.R. Holt had established a lumberyard in Chicago in 1847. In 1854, he and Richard Mason started a sawmill at Masonville, Michigan. The lumber was transported by ship to Chicago. In 1857, the partnership dissolved. In 1862, Holt joined with Uri Balcom to purchase the Norton Lumber Company sawmill in the city of Oconto. Holt bought out Balcom in 1888, and the firm reorganized as the Holt Lumber Company. After D.R. Holt's death in 1899, his sons George Holt and W.A. Holt (1865-1953) managed the company. George sold out to W.A. in 1922. The sawmill in Oconto operated until 1938, and the planing mill closed in 1940.¹⁷

The Holt Lumber Company cut white pine along the Oconto River and its tributaries first, floating the logs down river to the company's sawmill in the city of Oconto. From there, lumber was transported by ship to growing urban areas such as Milwaukee and Chicago. Logging intensified in northern Oconto County in the 1890s, with the clear-cutting of the less-valuable hardwoods. The extension of the railroad through the area in 1896 made harvesting this timber, which would not float, economically viable for the lumber company. Between 1903 and 1909, Holt built a series of spurs from the main line in northern Oconto County, to transport hardwoods by rail to sawmills and wood products factories in Oconto and Peshtigo, Wisconsin. Finished products were then shipped by rail to large urban markets.¹⁸

Although logging continued in northern Oconto County into the early twentieth century, it declined rapidly in the 1920s as timber was depleted. As the land was cleared, lumber companies and the railroads typically formed land sales subsidiaries, and promoted the "cutover" to new settlers as agricultural land. Land promotion brought an influx of Swedish immigrants to northern Oconto County between 1900 and 1910, while a Chicago realty firm called Home Lands sold 40-acre parcels to

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 8-9, 40-41, and 58.

¹⁷ *History of Northern Wisconsin*, p. 658; and F.L. Holmes, editor, *Dictionary of Wisconsin History*, [on-line dictionary of Wisconsin history, maintained by the Wisconsin Historical Society], <<http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary>>, retrieved 21 January 2008.

¹⁸ Elbe, p. 18; and Barbara L. Wyatt, editor, *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986), III: 5-12 through 5-15.

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

would-be farmers in the late 1910s.¹⁹ Armstrong Township, including present-day Riverview Township, grew during this period, from 159 residents in 1895, to 889 in 1920. The number of farms in Oconto County peaked in 1921, with 3,114 farms.²⁰ Farmers cultivated potatoes successfully into the 1920s, supporting three potato warehouses alongside the railroad in Mountain. In 1915, a pickle factory was built in Mountain, and during the 1920s Gillett Canning Company (based in the community of Gillett, some 20 miles southeast of Mountain on the Chicago & North Western line) contracted with farmers to raise wax beans. In addition, there was enough dairying to prompt the establishment of a cheese factory in 1925.²¹

Despite some initial success, poor soils and stump-filled lands, the short growing season, and inadequate roads to markets forced many farmers in the cutover into tax delinquency in the 1920s. The tax burden was compounded in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when lumber companies abandoned the cutover land they could not sell. During the same period, the price of agricultural products dropped. These factors caused many farmers to lose their lands.²²

By the mid-1920s, state and federal governments had realized that the cutover was not suited to agriculture, and began to promote reforestation. While the pulp and paper industry gradually came to consider forest management as an alternative to clear cutting, they lacked the finances to restore and manage such lands. The Clarke-McNary Act of 1924 authorized the federal government to purchase lands for national forests, which would present model forest management techniques and preserve timber production. Following approval by the Wisconsin legislature in 1925, hundreds of thousands of acres of northern cutover were surveyed and proposed for federal purchase. The McNary-Woodruff Act of 1928 provided funds to purchase lands under the Clarke-McNary Act. In December 1928, the Oneida Purchase Unit (in the vicinity of Rhinelander, later the Argonne Unit) became the first acquisition of what would become the Nicolet National Forest. In March 1932, the National Forest Reservation Commission approved the establishment of the 204,800-acre Oconto Purchase Unit (later called Lakewood), covering portions of Forest, Vilas, Oconto, and Langlade counties. In March 1933, the Nicolet National Forest was created, with a total of 219,428 acres. In March 1934, three districts were established: the Argonne, Peshtigo, and Oconto (later called Lakewood). The Oconto Purchase Unit included hundreds of acres in the vicinity of the community of Mountain, in Riverview and Armstrong townships. The Nicolet National Forest would eventually grow to encompass 662,000

¹⁹ Elbe, pp. 27, and 72-73.

²⁰ Henry, pp. 21, and 30-31.

²¹ Elbe, pp. 72-73.

²² Wyatt, II: 4-1 through 4-4.

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

acres in parts of Florence, Forest, Langlade, Oconto, Oneida and Vilas counties.²³

In the mid-1930s, 22 federal CCC camps were established in the Nicolet National Forest, bringing hundreds of men to plant trees, build bridges and roads, and carry out other conservation and forest management projects under the direction of the USDA Forest Service. The Mountain CCC Camp F-19 operated from 13 June 1933 until at least the winter of 1941-42.²⁴ The last CCC camps in the Nicolet National Forest closed in July 1942. Since that time, the personnel of the USDA Forest Service have guided wildlife and fish management, outdoor recreation, reforestation, and fire protection efforts benefiting the thousands of visitors who come to the Nicolet National Forest every year. In addition, the Nicolet National Forest provides millions of board feet of timber and pulpwood for commercial use each year.²⁵ Today, tourism, recreation, and selective logging in the Nicolet National Forest remain integral to the economy of northern Oconto County.

SIGNIFICANCE: CONSERVATION

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is locally significant in the area of Conservation, representing the joint efforts of the USDA Forest Service and the Wisconsin Conservation Commission to protect northern Wisconsin's timber resources from fire. By 1930, the two agencies had developed a cooperative program for fire detection and suppression to preserve the remaining timbered areas left undisturbed by logging, and protect the forest restoration projects. Lookout towers served as the central link in the fire detection system. Between 1932 and 1935, the Wisconsin Conservation Commission owned and operated several towers, including the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower, on what became USDA Forest Service lands. The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower was built by the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, and relocated by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1935,

²³ Harold K. Steen, *The USDA Forest Service: A History*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), pp. 183-95; Kennell M. Elliot, *History of Nicolet National Forest: 1928-1976*, (Rhinelander, Wisconsin: USDA Forest Service and Forest History Association of Wisconsin, 1977), p. 11; and William G. Robbins, *American Forestry: A History of National, State and Private Cooperation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 85-103; all cited in Joyce McKay, "Fifield Fire Lookout Tower," Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, 13 March 1996, revised 16 August 2006, p. 8-7.

²⁴ Elbe, p. 89; and Heisler.

²⁵ David Haugen, Phillip C. Freeman and Mark A. Theisen, *The Forest Resources of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest*, (St. Paul, Minnesota: North Central Research Station – USDA Forest Service, 1998), p. 7.

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower
Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

following the creation of the Nicolet National Forest in 1933. The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower continued to serve through the 1960s, when observation from aircraft superseded its use.

Brief History of the USDA Forest Service

The USDA Forest Service is rooted in the nineteenth-century American conservation movement, which traces its beginnings to the Romantic Movement of the early-nineteenth century. Authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau venerated nature, while denigrating industrialization and urbanization. The publication of George Perkins Marsh's, *Man and Nature Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* in 1864 used scientific analysis to justify concerns over the exploitation of natural resources, and the harm human activities cause the environment. This influential book helped the public realize that natural resources are not inexhaustible, and fostered the growth of favorable public opinion toward the role of the federal government in forest conservation. This led to the creation of the first national park, Yellowstone, in 1872.²⁶

In Wisconsin, Increase Lapham called attention to rapid deforestation and impending timber exhaustion in his 1867, *Report on the Disastrous Effect of the Destruction of Forest Trees Now Going on so Rapidly in the State of Wisconsin*. Lapham predicted serious environmental and economic consequences, such as disastrous forest fires, if logging went on unchecked. The Peshtigo Fire of October 1871, which took 1500 lives and 1.25 million acres in northeastern Wisconsin, including in and around present-day Riverview Township, provided tragic confirmation to Lapham's predictions.²⁷

Despite extensive forest fires, such as the one at Peshtigo, federal and state support for conservation grew slowly through the late-nineteenth century. In 1881, the Division of Forestry was created within the USDA. Although its first director, Franklin B. Hough, and his successors, lobbied for the public ownership of forests, and advocated reforestation and the selective cutting of timber, no federal action was taken until Congress enacted the Forest Reserve Act in 1891. This act gave the President authority to create forest reserves by eminent domain, but not through land purchase. However, Congress made no provision for the management or protection of these reserved lands. Almost immediately, President

²⁶ Roderick Nash, editor, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed., (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 44-66, and 84-95, cited in McKay, 8-4.

²⁷ Vernon Carstensen, *Farms or Forests: Evolution of a State Land Policy for Northern Wisconsin*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1958), pp. 6-9, cited in McKay, 8-4; and Kennell M. Elliott, *History of Nicolet National Forest*, 2nd ed., (Rhinelander, Wisconsin: USDA Forest Service and the Forest History Association of Wisconsin, 1989), p. 32.

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Benjamin Harrison set aside the first federal forest reserve: the 1.2 million-acre Yellowstone Forest Reserve, later known as the Shoshone and Teton national forests, adjacent to Yellowstone National Park. By 1897, there were 40 million acres of federal forest reserves in the United States.²⁸

However, the Forest Reserve Act failed to define the purpose of national forest reserves, effectively preventing the use of forest resources. As a result, western mining and timbering businesses vehemently opposed increasing public forest reserves. In response, Congress passed the Forest Management Act of 1897, which specifically prohibited the President from taking lands that would be more valuable for agriculture (including as lumbering) or mineral extraction. It also defined the purposes of the 1891 act as watershed protection, fire prevention, and the provision of timber resources for the nation. The 1897 Forest Management Act remained the basis for forest management by the federal government until the passage of the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960.²⁹

Gifford Pinchot became the head of the Division of Forestry in 1898. Pinchot recognized that the public forest reserves possessed many resources vital to the nation's industries. He developed efficient policies for their management, eventually published in his *Use Book*, in 1915. Pinchot's approach to forest management promoted continued forest production to enable stabilization of the lumber industry and maintenance of the most appropriate uses.³⁰ Pinchot also laid out the administrative structure for forests reserves, and established the rules and regulations to guide management decisions in the field. The decentralized forest administration system Pinchot initiated in 1897 and revised in 1908 remains the basis of the USDA Forest Service management system to the present. Pinchot divided the country into forest districts, each headed by a district Forester. The regional headquarters was to oversee the inspection and review of individual forest management techniques and plans. The districts were to be subdivided into national forests, each headed by a forest supervisor, and forests were divided into districts supervised by district rangers. The larger districts, which became regions in 1930, would play a central role in the supervision of CCC activities.³¹

In 1905, the title of the Bureau of Forestry was changed to the USDA Forest Service. In 1907, the

²⁸ Williams, pp. 277-78, 376-77, 400, and 449-50, cited in McKay, 8-5.

²⁹ Steen, pp. 103-45; and Williams, pp. 414-16; both cited in McKay, 8-5 and 8-6.

³⁰ Henry Clepper and Arthur Meyer, *American Forestry: Six Decades of Growth*, (Washington, D.C.: Society of American Foresters, 1960), p. 83; Glen O. Robinson, *The Forest Service: A Study in Public Land Management*, (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 155; and Steen, p. 75; all cited in McKay, 8-6.

³¹ Steen, pp. 76-81, cited in McKay, 8-7.

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forest reserves were renamed national forests. At the time, there were 60 national forests, with a total of 63 million acres. Forest expansion continued, with the addition of another 147 million acres in national forests by 1909. Because federal law only allowed public acquisition of forest lands by eminent domain, all the national forests were located in the western U.S. Influential political groups in the eastern U.S. pressed Congress to create forests in their states, where lack of large areas in public domain meant that national forests could only be created through federal land purchase. In 1911, Congress passed the Weeks Act, authorizing federal land purchase at the upper headwaters of navigable streams. The Weeks Act also created the National Forest Reservation Commission, which would determine the locations of new forests, and provided matching funds to create state forestry agencies to develop fire control programs.³²

After 1910, the federal government began promoting the recreational use of the national forests. Congress passed the Special Use Permit Act in 1915, which authorized permits for summer homes and other recreational buildings in national forests. In 1916, Congress created the National Park Service, to administer recreation in national forests and parks.³³

Federal legislation enacted in the 1920s built on the Weeks Act. The Clarke-McNary Act of 1924 expanded the areas of forest purchase and improved the management of the national forests. The act permitted the acquisition of forest lands within the watersheds of navigable streams. This resulted in the rapid creation of purchase units in Wisconsin, and other eastern states. The law authorized federal appropriations for cooperative, voluntary state programs that fostered proper timber management and protection. The funding supported forest research and the study of the forest tax policy, fire control, farm forestry extension, the establishment of nurseries for production and distribution of forest planting stock in the federal-state cooperative program, and the enlargement of the national forest system. The McNary-Woodruff Act of 1928 authorized funds to purchase lands under the Clark-McNary and Weeks acts. The 1928 McSweeney-McNary Act secured financial support for forest research. And the Knutson-Vandenberg Act of 1930 allotted funds for planting in the national forests and on cutover lands.³⁴

In 1933, the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued the Copeland Report, *A National Plan for American Forestry*. The most comprehensive survey of American forests to date, this report provided

³² Robbins, pp. 50-84; and Steen, pp. 69-103, and 122-31; both cited in McKay, 8-7 and 8-8.

³³ Steen, pp. 113-22, cited in McKay, 8-8.

³⁴ Clepper and Meyer, pp. 10 and 477; Robbins, pp. 85-103; and Steen, pp. 185-195; all cited in McKay, 8-8 and 8-9.

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detailed recommendations to reverse the deterioration of American forests. The most significant points directed a tremendous increase in the public ownership of forest lands and called for more intensive management of federal and state forests. It also strongly encouraged states to develop appropriate forest management techniques in cooperation with the depressed lumber industry. President Franklin D. Roosevelt incorporated many of the Copeland Report's recommendations into his national recovery program in 1933. The report indicated that sufficient work existed in the national forests to employ 135,000 men for one year at a cost of \$160,000,000. This recommendation at once provided a means of work relief and a means to reverse the deterioration of the nation's natural resources. The CCC, inaugurated in April 1933, would put thousands of young men to work on projects in the nation's forests, under the direction of the USDA Forest Service, by the fall of 1933.³⁵

During the mid-1930s, the USDA Forest Service also pursued an aggressive program to increase federal and state forest ownership, and establish sustained-yield forest management. The USDA Forest Service cooperated with private timber owners in forest protection, and with state agencies in developing sustained-yield management plans. By the late 1930s, the USDA Forest Service's 150 national forests in 39 states all presented models of sustained-yield management. Since that time, the USDA Forest Service has operated national forests not only as models of forest management, but also to provide recreational opportunities to the many visitors, and to benefit the quality of economic and social life of the local communities. Fire detection and suppression remains an important facet of forest management.³⁶

Brief History of Forest Conservation Efforts in Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Conservation Commission

Early forest conservation efforts in Wisconsin arose in response to devastating fires, which were largely a result of the large-scale logging practices of the late-nineteenth century. Thousands of acres of timber were clear cut, leaving a heavy litter of slash. The slash ignited in extremely dry weather, by lightning strikes, or in the presence of sparks from mechanical equipment such as railroad locomotives and machinery used in logging. Fires beginning in clear-cut areas destroyed thousands of acres in Wisconsin yearly, between 1870 and 1925. Some years, millions of acres burned. Fires not only depleted the existing forest, they killed seedlings, scarred the bark of standing trees permitting the spread of disease, and in some cases scorched the earth, burning the humus and degrading the soils. Denuded watersheds considerably increased soil erosion. These processes substantially delayed forest

³⁵ Steen, p. 224; and Clepper and Meyer, pp. 11, 463-467; both cited in McKay, 8-9.

³⁶ Steen, pp. 224-29, cited in McKay, 8-11.

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rejuvenation and produced timber of low commercial quality.³⁷

After the 1871 Peshtigo fire, the Wisconsin legislature prohibited the burning of slash between August and November. However, there were no enforcement provisions until 1885, when town boards were given the authority to enforce the law. Wisconsin enacted forestry laws in 1895 and 1897, which were largely ineffective. These acts established a state forest warden, who could appoint town fire wardens to enforce burning prohibitions and fight fires. However, the annual budget for each town fire warden was limited to \$100.³⁸

The Wisconsin legislature created the Forestry Commission in 1903, and established a superintendent of forests, and a state forest reserve. The superintendent of forests also served as state fire warden, empowered to select town fire wardens. Town fire wardens were still limited to a budget of \$100 a year and were not provided with equipment. The state forest reserve was to contain state-owned lands in four northern counties selected from those that had been held in public ownership to fund education. Some 40,000 acres in Vilas County served as the nucleus of the reserve. Revenue from the sale of timber on state lands was earmarked to purchase additional lands. A 1905 act replaced the Forestry Commission with the State Board of Forestry, and expanded the area from which state reserves could be selected to any lands north of Township 33 North. The sources of revenue were also expanded, to include funds from the sale of state lands north of Township 33 North.³⁹

In 1910, voters approved an amendment to the Wisconsin constitution, which permitted the state to appropriate funds for forestry as a work of internal improvement. The legislature renewed the forestry legislation of 1905 in 1911, and raised the annual appropriation for forestry. The Board of Forestry attempted to ensure the state's timber supply by expanding its forest reserves. By 1915, reserve lands totaled 365,000 acres. Many of these lands were cutover lands.⁴⁰

Although there were 300 fire wardens in 33 counties by 1908, their effectiveness remained limited. The towns lacked equipment and adequate manpower. Huge fires in 1908 and 1910 destroyed some 2

³⁷ R. B. Goodman, "Conditions Essential to Selective Cutting in Northern Wisconsin Hardwoods and Hemlock," *Journal of Forestry*, 1930, volume 28, pp. 1070-1078, cited in McKay, 8-18.

³⁸ Carstensen, pp. 7, 21-22, and 28, cited in McKay, 8-18.

³⁹ Carstensen, pp. 33-35, cited in McKay, 8-19.

⁴⁰ Wisconsin Interim Committee on Forestry and Public Lands, *Report of the Interim Committee on Forestry and Public Lands to the Wisconsin Legislature of 1929*, (Madison: Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, 1929), pp. 12-13, cited in McKay, 8-19.

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million acres, including in the vicinity of Mountain.⁴¹

In 1910, the USDA Forest Service introduced the use of fire towers, and telephone lines to communicate about fires. The 1911 Weeks Act provided partial funding to state forestry agencies creating forest fire control programs protecting state and private lands. The funds were to support fire patrols only, the state was to prepare a plan of cooperation for approval by the USDA Forest Service. Appropriations to each state were limited to \$10,000. Six states including Wisconsin received these funds in 1911-1912. This marked the beginning of the cooperative effort between the federal government and the state of Wisconsin in forest fire prevention and suppression.⁴²

The 1908 and 1910 conflagrations in Wisconsin and federal support under the Weeks Act stimulated significant improvement in the state forestry program in 1911. The State Board of Forestry shifted its emphasis from the creation of forest reserves to improving these reserves, and advancing fire protection organization. A fire patrol system was organized and fire protection was improved with the opening of 180 miles of roads and trails, 40 miles of fire lanes, 50 miles of telephone lines, the construction of four ranger stations, and the establishment of the state forester's headquarters at Trout Lake, near Boulder Junction, Wisconsin. Through a 1911 cooperative agreement under the Weeks Act, the federal government provided the salaries of one-half of the 24 rangers and nine seasonal patrolmen. Town and special fire wardens continued to provide their own equipment. In 1912, the first fire lookout towers were erected in Wisconsin public forest reserves. These were four 55-foot steel frame fire towers, connected by telephone to the headquarters at Trout Lake and to the ranger stations. By 1915, fire suppression improvements had expanded to include 37 buildings to house rangers and equipment, four fire towers, 250 miles of road, 140 miles of fire lanes, and 86 miles of telephone lines.⁴³

Wisconsin forest conservation and protection efforts suffered a setback in 1915, when the Wisconsin Supreme Court found the 1910 forestry amendment to the state constitution invalid. Land speculators and lumber companies in Vilas and Oneida counties had initiated the case. This ruling removed the

⁴¹ F.G. Wilson, *E.M. Griffith and the Early Story of Wisconsin Forestry: 1903-1915*, (Madison: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 1982), pp. 20-23, cited in McKay, 8-20.

⁴² Clepper and Meyer, pp. 442-47; Steen, pp. 129-30 and 175; and Robinson, pp. 50-55; all cited in McKay, 8-20.

⁴³ J. Alfred Mitchell and Neil LeMay, *Forest Fires and Forest Fire Control in Wisconsin: A Historical Record of Forest Protection Activities in Wisconsin*, (Washington, D.C.: USDA Forest Service, 1952), pp. 19-23, cited in McKay, 8-20.

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forest reserves from the jurisdiction of the Board of Forestry. The Wisconsin legislature then abolished the Board of Forestry, and created the Wisconsin Conservation Commission.⁴⁴

As a result of the Supreme Court decision of 1915, the work of the WCC was primarily limited to fire protection. The 1915-1916 fire protection plan created seven districts covering 1.7 million acres. A ranger supervised each district. The budget to support fire-fighting crews under town fire wardens remained inadequate. The USDA Forest Service directed the state to assign five seasonal fire patrolmen to districts outside state lands in 1919. The WCC created protection districts for private lands in Bayfield and Douglas counties in 1920. Private land owners, notably lumber companies, cooperated in this effort. For example, the Rust Owen Lumber Company and the Cornell Wood Products Company coordinated with the WCC to protect their lands in Bayfield and Douglas counties.⁴⁵

Between 1915 and 1925, public attitude toward forestry and fire protection altered dramatically in Wisconsin. During this period, land values for northern cutover lands had risen and collapsed. Many cutover farms failed. Many lumber concerns left the state. Of the eleven million acres in the seventeen northern counties, 2.5 million acres had become tax delinquent by 1925. Another factor was the rise of the pulp and paper industry, which valued reforestation as a mode of developing continuous supplies of wood pulp in the state. Public support for forest production combined with soaring tax delinquency led Wisconsin voters to approve another forestry amendment to the state constitution in 1924. This amendment permitted the state to appropriate monies up to a specified amount to acquire, preserve, and develop forest lands in the state, to create state forest reserves, and to engage in the forest fire protection. In a clarifying action, the Wisconsin Supreme Court found this amendment valid.⁴⁶

In 1925, the WCC established a new fire protection program. The state legislature appropriated funds to finance the costs of fire detection, law enforcement, and fire-fighting equipment. While the towns each appointed a fire warden, supervised by the state protection district rangers, the state now provided fifty percent of the funding for each fire warden. During the late 1920s, the federal Clark-McNary Act and McNary-Woodruff Act brought thousands of dollars of federal monies to support cooperative fire

⁴⁴ Wisconsin Interim Committee on Forestry and Public Lands, pp. 13-16; and Carstensen, pp. 48-53; both cited in McKay, 8-21 and 8-22.

⁴⁵ Mitchell and LeMay, pp. 31-33; and Wisconsin Interim Committee on Forestry and Public Lands, p. 16; both cited in McKay, 8-22.

⁴⁶ Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission: 1927-1928*, (Madison: Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1929), p. 8, cited in McKay, 8-22.

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protection to Wisconsin. Additionally, Wisconsin's counties shared in these costs. Thus, federal, state, and county levels of government cooperated in the state's fire protection program.⁴⁷

The state reorganized the WCC in 1927, creating the Division of Forest Protection to oversee the fire protection program. In 1927, the state expanded fire protection districts from the six that had been established in 1923, to 11, protecting a total of 13.5 million acres. Fire protection headquarters were erected and equipped in eight of the districts by 1928. The WCC also expanded the number of emergency fire wardens and fire fighting unit leaders from 21 to 40 in each district. Members of local American Legion posts cooperated with the districts by joining fire-fighting units, and helping raise public awareness about fire prevention.⁴⁸

The Wisconsin Division of Forest Protection and the USDA Forest Service worked together to develop the forest protection program. The fire lookout tower was the primary means of detecting fire, and was connected by telephone to fire protection headquarters and area fire warden. The joint fire-protection program aimed to make all areas of the protection districts visible from its system of fire towers. Fifty-four fire towers stood by the end of 1927. By the close of 1929, the fire detection system included 89 active fire towers. The WCC designed new standard ladder and stair towers circa 1929 and again in the early 1930s. Most of the towers were made by the Aermotor Company of Chicago, prefabricated and shipped in pieces to northern Wisconsin, where the WCC would assemble and install them. Between 1929 and 1932, the WCC erected 29 steel towers, rebuilt 13, strengthened 31 towers, and constructed 13 tower cabins to accommodate the tower lookouts. The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower was one of these towers, erected in October 1932.⁴⁹ It appears to be a standard Aermotor Company LS-40 design, rather than a WCC design.

In 1932, a portion of the \$8 million Wisconsin received in federal unemployment relief funds was funneled to the WCC, for fire suppression and improving fire-protection facilities in the forest protection districts. The WCC was directed to choose projects that would require large amounts of

⁴⁷ Wisconsin Interim Committee on Forestry and Public Lands, p. 33; and Clepper and Meyer, p. 96; both cited in McKay, 8-22 and 8-23.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Mitchell and LeMay, pp. 20, 26-28, 32-35; Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission: 1929-30*, (Madison: Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1931), p. 38; and Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission: 1931-32*, (Madison: Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1933), p. 55; all cited in McKay, 8-24 and 8-25.

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labor, and to hire the maximum number of unemployed workers living near the project areas. Work began in February 1932 and continued through the end of the year. During this period, the WCC employed 12,790 workers and completed 416 projects in 30 counties across the forest protection districts, including building fire roads and fire lanes, stringing telephone lines, and erecting state ranger headquarters and substations, fire towers, and warehouses. The labor and materials used to erect the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower on its original site in October 1932 likely came from this appropriation. The WCC completed similar projects with federal unemployment relief funds in 1933.⁵⁰

By 1932, the USDA Forest Service had acquired the nucleus of what would become the Nicolet and Chequamegon national forests. With the formal creation of the Nicolet National Forest in March 1933, the USDA Forest Service took a more active role in joint federal-state efforts to develop a fire-protection program. The WCC and the USDA Forest Service expanded the fire-detection system. By 1935, the WCC had 119 towers on state lands, positioned every 10 to 15 miles, enabling complete surveillance of the state forests. In all, 38 towers operated in the Nicolet and Chequamegon national forests. In both state and national forests, the fire towers were galvanized steel, 60 to 100 feet in height, like the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower. The WCC, the USDA Forest Service, the US Army, and the CCC worked together to build fire towers and buildings for the tower attendants, to connect the tower sites by telephone line to state ranger stations and protection headquarters, or to guard stations and ranger district offices. The two agencies continued to improve access roads to and through forest lands, and removed slash along the road and trails. Enrollees of the CCC provided most of the labor. In fact, the chief focus of the CCC in Wisconsin's forests was fire protection and suppression.⁵¹

Federal, state and local fire fighting crews coordinated fire suppression. According to a general

⁵⁰ Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission: 1931-32*, p. 55-57; and Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1933-34*, (Madison: Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1935), pp. 13-15; both cited in McKay, 8-26.

⁵¹ Clepper and Meyer, pp. 212, 452-54, 481-82; Robbins, pp. 148-49; Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1933-34*, pp. 17-19 and 33; Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1935-36*, (Madison: Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1937), pp. 29-32, and 125-129; Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1937-38*, (Madison: Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1939), p. 113; and Wisconsin Conservation Commission, *Biennial Report of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1939-40*, (Madison: Wisconsin Conservation Commission, 1941), p. 24; all cited in McKay, 8-22 and 8-27.

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agreement enacted in 1934, the WCC suppressed fires outside the national forest boundaries while the USDA Forest Service responded to fires on lands within its purchase units, whether federal or private. However, state and federal towers cooperated in sighting fires and frequently disregarded boundaries in instances of severe fires. During the mid-1930s, the USDA Forest Service took ownership of most of the state towers on its lands, including the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower, then still located on its original site. In 1935, the USDA Forest Service purchased the site on which the Mountain tower currently sits from the Holt Lumber Company. The men of a local CCC camp are believed to have disassembled, moved, and reconstructed the Mountain tower on its present site the same year.⁵²

Nineteen fire lookout towers are known to have been constructed in the Nicolet National Forest. The towers remained the center of the fire detection system into the 1960s. The Aermotor Company of Chicago supplied prefabricated towers to the WCC, including the one at Mountain, and in fact provided most of the fire towers in national parks throughout the eastern U.S. The Aermotor Company, established by LaVerne Noyes in Chicago in 1888, was best known for manufacturing windmills. In 1916, Aermotor began producing fire tower kits. The typical design was 80 to 100 feet high, with a 7 foot by 7 foot cab.⁵³

Although agencies such as the WCC often produced the initial tower specifications, and the Aermotor Company adapted its standard plans to meet the agency's requirements, the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower appears to have been a standard Aermotor LS-40 design. As was typical, the Aermotor Company supplied all the parts for the tower, the materials necessary for its construction, along with blue prints for its assembly. An assembly crew composed of a foreman and four or five men was needed to erect the tower, moving from the footings upward, horizontal section by horizontal section, beginning with the corner posts and including the corresponding section of the ladder.⁵⁴

The tower lookout was responsible for fire detection. During the Depression, the lookout was often a CCC enrollee, as was the case at the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower.⁵⁵ After 1942, a seasonal USDA Forest Service employee staffed the tower. Tower lookouts were housed at the nearby CCC camps or in an adjacent cabin. The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower attendant's cabin was constructed in 1936. A garage/woodshed, a privy and a well were constructed sometime between 1936 and 1938. The

⁵² Kim Schoenebeck to Kim Potaracke, personal communication, 1992, Mountain Tower folder.

⁵³ *Forest Service Towers*; and *History of the Aermotor Company*, <<http://aermotorwindmill.com/Company/history>>, retrieved 19 January 2008.

⁵⁴ "Assembly 7-foot x 7-foot Lookout Tower-Stairway Type MC-39."

⁵⁵ Heisler.

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lookouts manned the towers during fire season, usually from May through September, during day light hours. Fire season and length of daily assignments in the tower varied considerably according the level of dryness. Lookouts on federal land reported the fire to a control tower or to their CCC camp. Other lookouts heard the call, and triangulated the fire. Crews were then dispatched from the nearest CCC camp. State lookouts communicated with the ranger district or sub-district station which in turn notified the nearest CCC camp, WPA crew, or local fire-fighting unit.⁵⁶

Construction of fire lookout towers generally ended in the 1940s, although replacement, repair, and improvement continued on a limited scale. Helicopter and airplane surveillance, and portable two-way radios began to replace the use of fire towers and telephones during the 1950s. The USDA Forest Service largely ceased manning the towers in the 1960s and early 1970s. At the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower, the attendant's cabin and other support structures were removed in the 1950s. Use of the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower itself continued until 25 April 1970, when the last fire was called in from its cab.⁵⁷

SIGNIFICANCE: GOVERNMENT

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is locally significant in the area of Government because of its association with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and its fire-fighting duties in the Nicolet National Forest. A local CCC camp is believed to have dismantled the tower on its original site, moved it, and reconstructed it on its current site in 1935. Although it is uncertain, it is possible that CCC enrollees built the tower attendant's cabin and support structures in 1936-38. Men of the Mountain CCC camp manned the tower and fought fires in the vicinity through 1941.

The CCC was a part of the first successful nation-wide relief program devised by the U.S. government. It was created in response to the tremendous economic and social problems of the Depression. In 1932, 20 percent of the American work force or 28 million were jobless and millions were homeless. Between 1929 and 1933, the percentage of young men between the ages of 15 and 24 suffering unemployment rose from 3 percent to 25 percent. Although traditionally, responsibility for relief belonged to the family or the local community, the unprecedented severity of the Depression necessitated some form of public relief. President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced his New Deal relief program to Congress in early 1933. While it has been questioned whether the New Deal programs or World War II finally ended the Depression, the Roosevelt administration did successfully

⁵⁶ Mitchell and LeMay, pp. 31-32, cited in McKay, 8-29; and Heisler.

⁵⁷ Records, Mountain Tower folder; and Mitchell and LeMay, p. 33.

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put into action at the federal level a group of programs which relieved financial suffering and social distress of a significant number of citizens, provided work to the unemployed of many backgrounds, and launched a highly prolific public works and conservation program which left many tangible reminders of the program on the nation's landscape.⁵⁸

The CCC is among the better known of the New Deal relief programs. It was initially known as the Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) program, and was authorized by Congress in March 1933. The ECW was a relief agency intended to address both the depressed economy and the long-term deterioration of the natural resources. The package offered a strategy to restore 600 million acres of forested land, as well as the eroded farmlands in the dust bowl of the Plains, and it provided the labor to resolve them.⁵⁹

The ECW would enroll 250,000 young men by July 1, 1933 to undertake conservation and recreation work in the nation's parks and forests. Rather than offering doles to the unemployed, the program's funds supported useful projects of public benefit employing those needing work. The program also provided some training to men just reaching the age of employment. The program remained formally titled the Emergency Conservation Work program until 1937 when it officially became the Civilian Conservation Corps program. The CCC began operation on 5 April 1933.⁶⁰

Four existing federal agencies collaborated to execute the ECW program. The departments of War, Labor, Agriculture, and Interior each played a role. The Labor Department selected the enrollees from the state relief rolls. The Department of the Army provided staff for basic conditioning programs at the CCC district headquarters and oversaw the building, organization, supply, and daily operation of the CCC work camps. It transported, fed, clothed, and disciplined the men. The Departments of Interior and Agriculture supervised the work projects. The National Park Service in the Department of the Interior oversaw national and state park projects. This work included not only construction of recreational facilities and park landscaping but also erosion control. The Department of Agriculture was responsible for soil conservation and, through the USDA Forest Service, for fire protection,

⁵⁸ John Braeman and David Brody, *The New Deal*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1975), vol. 1, p. 124, cited in McKay, 8-33.

⁵⁹ John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1967), pp. 8-11, cited in McKay, 8-33.

⁶⁰ A.L. Reisch Owen, *Conservation Under FDR*, (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 84; and Conrad L. Wirth, *Parks, Politics, and the People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), pp. 67-70; both cited in McKay, 8-34.

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reforestation, and recreation projects in national and state forests.

Ninety percent of the enrollees in the CCC were between the ages of 18 and 23, unmarried, and from families on relief. By September 30, 1933, the CCC included 337,020 enrollees. By the program's end in July 1942, the CCC had enrolled a total of 75,000 men from Wisconsin, and 92,000 enrollees had served in Wisconsin.⁶¹

Enrollee enlistment lasted for a six-month period, with the opportunity for reenlistment up to a maximum of one year. This limit was eventually raised to two years. The CCC enrollees received clothing, food, shelter, education, job training, and \$30 per month, of which \$25 went to their families. In exchange, enrollees worked a 40-hour week on the projects assigned to the camp. This program put young men to work, provided funds to economically-distressed family members, brought money into communities near the location of camps and projects, and accomplished a tremendous amount of conservation work throughout the nation.⁶²

The vast majority of the CCC enrollees were unskilled laborers from urban areas. Construction and forestry projects required the leadership of experienced workmen with sufficient technical skills. In April 1933, the president approved the hiring of up to 25,000 Local Experienced Men (LEM) who were unemployed woodsmen, foresters, construction workers, machine operators, mechanics, and blacksmiths from communities near the proposed projects. The LEMs provided additional technical skills and leadership as foremen on the work crews. Many men from the community of Mountain served as LEMs at the Mountain CCC camp.⁶³

After completion of their basic training, CCC enrollees were assigned to 200-man camps. The first CCC camp in the nation was established in Virginia on 17 April 1933. Camp Brinks, organized on 4 May 1933 and located about 14 miles west of Washburn in Bayfield County, was the first CCC camp in Wisconsin.⁶⁴

Nationally, there were 1,469 CCC camps by 1 July 1933. The USDA Forest Service oversaw a

⁶¹ Salmond, pp. 32-37, and 71-74, cited in McKay, 8-35.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ John C. Paige, *The Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Park Service, 1933-42: An Administrative History*, (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1985), pp. 44-45, 50-51, and 69; and Wirth, pp. 111-14; both cited in McKay, 8-35; and Elbe, p. 92.

⁶⁴ Salmond, p. 84, cited in McKay, 8-37.

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majority of these camps. The total number of camps peaked in September 1935 at 2,635. By October 1933, the Wisconsin national forests included 21 camps, 12 of them in the Nicolet National Forest. At peak enrollment in September 1935, the Chequamegon National Forest contained 23 camps and the Nicolet National Forest included 22 camps. At the close of the program in July 1942, only six CCC camps served both national forests.⁶⁵

Communities adjacent to the camps benefited from the presence of CCC camps in their areas. The CCC engaged locally unemployed, skilled men to serve as LEMS. By 1936, each camp in the Nicolet National Forest employed 16 LEMS. The construction and conservation projects improved the community and often attracted revenue from travelers using the new recreational facilities. Many of the camp supplies including food, tools, and building materials were purchased locally. These supplies contributed over \$1000 to \$5000 per month per camp to the local economy. The five dollars per month allowance to the enrollees were usually spent locally on entertainment. Thus, the presence of the CCC camp considerably reduced the economic crisis in the local community. In addition, CCC enrollees participated in community projects such as dramatic productions and other types of programs, which entertained and often raised money for a local cause. CCC camps also assisted with local emergencies ranging from disasters caused by flooding, drought, and fire to the location of missing persons and apprehension of criminals. For these reasons, the CCC camps retained a popular public image.⁶⁶

In Wisconsin's national forests, civilian technical staff from the USDA Forest Service supervised the enrollees' work program, and army personnel directed the operation of the camps. Prior to each six-month period, the superintendent and district ranger prepared a plan for projects, reviewed by the forest supervisor. The superintendent then coordinated the projects with the district rangers. Each CCC camp often worked on several projects simultaneously. Camps were also assigned to a specific area to perform routine work, especially fire protection and suppression, and forest improvement. The CCC fought a majority of the fires in the Nicolet and Chequamegon national forests and in many of the adjacent state forests until the last CCC camps closed in 1942.⁶⁷

CCC projects carried out in Wisconsin's national forests fell into four categories. Forest improvement

⁶⁵ Owen, p. 137; and CCC Camp Lists, Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests, USDA Forest Service Region 9, Great Lakes Region National Archives, Chicago, Illinois; both cited in McKay, p. 8-38.

⁶⁶ Salmond, pp. 35 and 102; Paige, p. 73-79; and Wirth, pp. 105-08 and 111; all cited in McKay, p. 8-40.

⁶⁷ Paige, pp. 66-69; Salmond, p. 87; and Elliot, pp. 42-43; all cited in McKay, p. 8-40.

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work included tree planting; developing and maintaining tree nurseries; establishing experimental plots for forest research; cone and seed collection; timber inventories and surveys; and lineal and topographic surveys and boundary marking and mapping for timber land purchase. Forest protection work involved removing fire hazards such as dead trees, limbs, and brush along roads and trails; constructing forest roads, trails, and bridges to permit access to fire fighters; building firebreaks to prevent fires from spreading; erecting fire towers, as well as cabins and garage/woodsheds for tower attendants; stringing telephone lines; digging wells to supply water to fire fighting tanks and pumps; manning fire towers; fighting fires; eradicating tree diseases; and controlling insects, rodents, and poisonous plants. Projects to control flooding and prevent soil erosion were also carried out. Finally, there were game and fish management projects, such as establishing wildlife refuges, and fish hatcheries.⁶⁸

In addition, the CCC constructed many recreational improvements in Wisconsin's national forests. These included hiking trails, access roads, bridges, trail side shelters, picnic grounds and associated shelters, dams for the creation of swimming and boating facilities, bathhouses, beaches, ski runs and jumps and warming shelters, toboggan trails, guest cabins, campgrounds, comfort stations, and landscaping. Finally, the CCC erected many of the administrative facilities in the forests including district ranger and guard stations with CCC labor. The enrollees erected such buildings as warehouses, offices, ranger dwellings and garages, guard station cabins, and oil houses.⁶⁹

From the beginning, Congress viewed the Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) as a temporary relief measure. It periodically extended the ECW through legislation, which appropriated money for the program by two-year periods. In June 1937, Congress changed the name of the program to the CCC. This act also shifted the purpose of the program. The program now combined vocational training with employment through public work. It required the enrollees to engage in the educational program, and capped the enrollment number at 300,000. The CCC remained a temporary agency, now extended for a period of three years until 1940.⁷⁰

In July 1939 Congress extended the program to 30 June 1943. However, as World War II loomed on the horizon, CCC enrollees were increasingly shifted to defense projects. By June 1940, some CCC camps had been relocated to military bases, and the number of CCC conservation and recreation projects fell dramatically. By mid-1941, the CCC was experiencing labor shortages as young men

⁶⁸ Elliot, p. 42; and Salmond, p. 122; both cited in McKay, p. 8-40.

⁶⁹ Salmond, p. 123; Owen, p. 129; and Elliot, pp. 40-42; both cited in McKay, p. 8-40.

⁷⁰ Salmond, p. 63, and 170-71; Paige, p. 21-26; both cited in McKay, p. 8-40.

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enlisted in the military or found jobs in the defense industry. Although the number of enrollees had stabilized at about 300,000 until the beginning of 1941, by October, the number of enrollees had declined to 160,000.⁷¹

When the U.S. entered World War II in December, all CCC projects not associated with defense were ordered completed. In some cases, the CCC employed paid labor to attain this goal. The remaining 350 occupied CCC camps, including six camps in the Nicolet and Chequamegon national forests, closed by mid-July 1942.⁷²

CONCLUSION

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is significant at the local level, in the areas of Conservation and Government. In Conservation, it represents the cooperative effort by the USDA Forest Service and the WCC to protect Wisconsin's northern forests from the ravages of fire. The two agencies developed a cooperative program of fire detection and suppression to preserve the remaining timbered areas left undisturbed by logging and protect woodland restoration projects. The fire lookout tower was the linchpin of the fire detection system. In the area of Government, the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is locally significant as one of the last remaining structures associated with the CCC and its fire-fighting activities in the Nicolet National Forest. A local CCC camp is believed to have supplied the labor that was used to dismantle the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower and move it to its present site in 1935. Enrollees of Mountain CCC Camp staffed the tower and fought fires in the vicinity. Many of the other sites and structures associated with CCC activity in the Nicolet National Forest are no longer standing.

The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is one of the last surviving examples of a metal fire lookout tower in the state of Wisconsin, and one of only two out of the 19 that once operated in the Nicolet National Forest. The other surviving tower in the Nicolet National Forest is the Laona Fire Lookout Tower. Seven more remain in the Chequamegon National Forest. They are the Clam Lake, West Fork, Long Mile (or Grand View), Jump River, Perkinstown, Fifield, and Iron River towers. All eight are comparable to the Mountain Tower and are of steel construction, rising 80 to 120 feet in height, and topped by a square cabin. The Long Mile, Fifield, Clam Lake and Laona towers were built by the WCC in 1932. They are Wisconsin Standard Ladder Protected designs with exterior ladders, manufactured by the Aermotor Company. The Iron River Tower, constructed in 1934, is an

⁷¹ Salmond, pp. 63-70, 177-79; Wirth, pp. 105, 121, and 131; and Paige, pp. 11, 26-27, and 29-30; all cited in McKay, pp. 8-42 and 8-43.

⁷² Wirth, p. 143; and Paige, pp. 29-34; both cited in McKay, p. 8-43.

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International Stacey design with an interior ladder. The CCC built the Jump River and Perkinstown towers, both interior ladder designs, in 1934, and the West Fork Tower, which features and interior staircase, in 1935.

All nine fire towers, including the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower, retain a high degree of integrity. All were determined eligible for the National Register, in the areas of Conservation and Government in 1996. The Fifield Tower was listed on the National Register in 2007. Although the wooden elements of many of the towers are deteriorated, most of the steel structure of the towers remains sound. Except for privies at the Long Mile, Jump River, and Perkinstown towers, adjacent buildings including the tower cabin, and garage/woodshed are no longer extant. Concrete footings, cellar holes, or depressions often mark the site. None of the towers are used for their original purpose, and most function primarily as radio towers. In 1994, the USDA Forest Service rehabilitated the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower for public access and interpretation. Archaeological examination and analysis of the foundation remains, depressions, and trash pits have yet to be evaluated at a majority of the properties. The archaeological component was not assessed in this examination of the property.

CRITERION CONSIDERATION B

Under Criterion Consideration B, a resource that has been moved from its original location is not eligible for the National Register unless it is primarily significant for its architectural value, or is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or an event in the broad pattern of U.S. history. The Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is one of only two surviving structures in the Nicolet National Forest representing the fire-protection system developed and maintained cooperatively by state and federal agencies: the WCC (now the Department of Natural Resources), and the USDA Forest Service. In the area of Government, the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower is also one of only two surviving structures in the Nicolet National Forest associated with the fire protection efforts of the CCC, that organization's principal activity in the forest. While the tower was originally constructed in 1932, the period of significance for the resource begins with its move to its current location in 1935. As these dates indicate, almost all of its active use was at the current location. Therefore, Criterion Consideration B does not prevent the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower from qualifying for the National Register, as it is one of the surviving structures most importantly associated with these broad patterns in U.S. history.

 End of Statement of Significance

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 Insert Boundary Descriptions

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the site are lines of convenience drawn within the Nicolet National Forest that form a square whose sides are located 100 feet from a point that is centered on the base of the tower.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary encompasses all remaining above-ground resources historically associated with the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower. Auxiliary resources, located on a site 350 feet northwest and downhill from the tower, have been demolished and the archaeological significance of their remains have not been established. Therefore, the boundary does not include the site of the auxiliary resources.

 End of Boundary Descriptions

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 Insert Photo Descriptions

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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower

Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

Photo taken February 2008, by Kim Potaracke, USDA Forest Service

Negatives on file, Forest Supervisor's Office, USDA Forest Service, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

View of the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower, looking east-southeast.

Photo 2 of 3

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower

Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

Photo taken February 2008, by Kim Potaracke, USDA Forest Service

Negatives on file, Forest Supervisor's Office, USDA Forest Service, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

View of the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower, looking east-southeast, showing tower in its setting.

Photo 3 of 3

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower

Town of Riverview, Oconto County, Wisconsin

Photo taken February 2008, by Kim Potaracke, USDA Forest Service

Negatives on file, Forest Supervisor's Office, USDA Forest Service, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

View of the Mountain Fire Lookout Tower, looking east-southeast.

 End of Photo Descriptions



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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower

T. Riverview, Oconto Co., WI



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Mountain Fire Lookout Tower

T. Riverview, Oconto Co., WI



3 of 3

Mountain Fire Lookout Tower

T. River view, Oconto Co., WI