

## Introduction

Fire lookouts represent one of the most intrinsically recognizable symbols of the ever watchful care of forestry agencies over the forests and rangelands of America. As a vital part of the fire management program, fire lookouts played a significant role in the unfolding story of protecting America's wildlands from fire. The State of California proved to be an especially fertile ground for the pioneering of systematic wildland fire protection. It was here that the Forest Service proposed, tested and adopted many of its current practices for both the organization of the fire management structure and for the strategy (and equipment) employed in the battle for fire control.

With the passage of time fire fighting methods, environmental conditions, population densities and fire operating budgets have changed. Likewise, the role of fire lookouts has evolved. A dramatic trend has been the steady decrease in the number of fire lookout stations left standing upon the mountains and hills of California. From a high of nearly 600 lookouts in the 1930s, it is estimated that today only a little over 250 sites still contain detection facilities. In short, fire lookouts represent a finite and dwindling historic (cultural) resource.

Cognizant of this attrition, the author of this report undertook a statewide survey and thematic study of the fire lookouts of California from 1983 to 1987. The research was intended to preserve (at least in writing and photographs) the remaining vestige of California's fire detection heritage. The project was carried out under the auspices of the Forest Service's, Region 5 (Pacific Southwest Region) Office. The study produced a contextual understanding for both fire lookout architecture and fire detection history. It also provided a complete inventory of California's standing lookouts, including Federal, State and locally owned facilities.

In 1987, the Region 5 Office contracted with the author for the purpose of conducting "an historic significance evaluation" of 173 Forest Service lookout stations in California. The methodology for evaluation was reviewed and approved by the Forest Service and the California Office of Historic Preservation. The net result was the determination that 75 Forest Service lookout properties were eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Forest Service has executed a Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement (PMOA) with the State Office of Historic Preservation to protect these buildings; however, as of December 1991, not one of these lookout stations has been listed in the National Register. More distressing is the fact that several of these lookouts have been seriously damaged or destroyed since the 1987 evaluations.

Next to the Forest Service, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF&FP) owns the largest collection

of fire lookout facilities in California. Recognizing their need to develop a management plan for these properties, CDF&FP contracted for an historic significance analysis of their holdings. Since the data gathered from the last statewide inventory was now five years old, an updated survey (field inspection) was performed during the fire season of 1991. This report presents the findings of that inventory, as well as the results of the historic significance evaluation. It is hoped that the State of California will adhere to a commitment to preserve in situ a representative sampling of its fire lookouts for both present and future generations to enjoy.

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While this report is intended as a cultural resource management document for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, it is anticipated that a number of individuals outside that organization will wish to read this history. For those unfamiliar with fire protection in California, a few words are in order.

Depending on fire type and location, fire protection is the responsibility of either the Federal, State or local government. The Federal Government assumes responsibilities for the protection from fire of natural resources on all federally owned land. The State, under the Public Resources Code, assumes primary responsibility for the protection from fire of natural resources upon those lands designated by the State Board of Forestry as "State Responsibility Area" (SRA). Local responsibility fire protection (LRA) can be described as the protection of life and property on SRA and the protection of life, property and vegetation on those lands not federally owned or designated SRA.

Local responsibility fire protection can be provided by county fire departments, special districts and/or city governments. Generally, the size, cost and sophistication of local fire protection systems will increase as the population and building density increases. Life and property protection systems range from organized protection in areas of scattered population and few improvements to fire departments with full time fire fighters operating engine companies, truck companies, rescue squads, etc. Between these extremes is an almost infinite variety of systems operated by volunteer, partly paid and fully paid fire fighters. Local government can opt to contract to other agencies for fire protection service. In this regard, a number of counties have secured the services of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for year round fire protection.

The focus of this history is the protection from fire of California's natural resources, i.e. wildland fire protection. In general, wildland fire protection involves those areas which contain inflammable material (fuels) such as grass, brush, deciduous and evergreen trees. Most of California's counties look

## Introduction

to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for seasonal protection of those properties which lie outside of federally owned and protected lands. The notable exceptions are the counties of Kern, Los Angeles, Marin, Orange, Santa Barbara and Ventura which maintain their own wildland fire protection service. Other California counties not directly protected by the CDF&FP are either highly urbanized or have a very low exposure risk to wildland fire.

Wildland fire is a real and ever present threat to the economic vitality and quality of life of California. California's climate, topography and fuels are conducive to a frequent and severe fire regime. Whether the fuels are live or dead vegetation or structural, the character and continuity of the fuel bed will significantly influence fire behavior. Fuel beds do not necessarily change at jurisdictional or activity boundaries; thus, adjacent fire protection agencies will view fires erupting along their boundaries as a "mutual threat." Consequently, fire protection services (federal, state and local) maintain "mutual aid agreements," whereby one agency will provide assistance to another in the event of a fire emergency. Furthermore, no fire protection service maintains enough resources (equipment and crews) on hand to adequately combat large event fires; therefore, shared (or pooled) resources has become a common practice, in which even agencies distant from a given emergency maybe called upon to lend support.

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Wildland fire management is comprised of five elements: fuels management, presuppression, prevention, detection and suppression. Fuels management involves vegetation modification. Presuppression entails fire emergency planning. Prevention deals with public education and fire regulation enforcement. Detection is the discovering and locating of fires. Suppression is the fighting of an on going fire.

Fire detection is divided into two major categories: patrol and fixed point. Patrols are conducted by ground and aerial units. Fixed point detection is by automated systems (imaging devices, etc.) or by operating fire lookout stations. The fire lookout station is the focus of this report.