

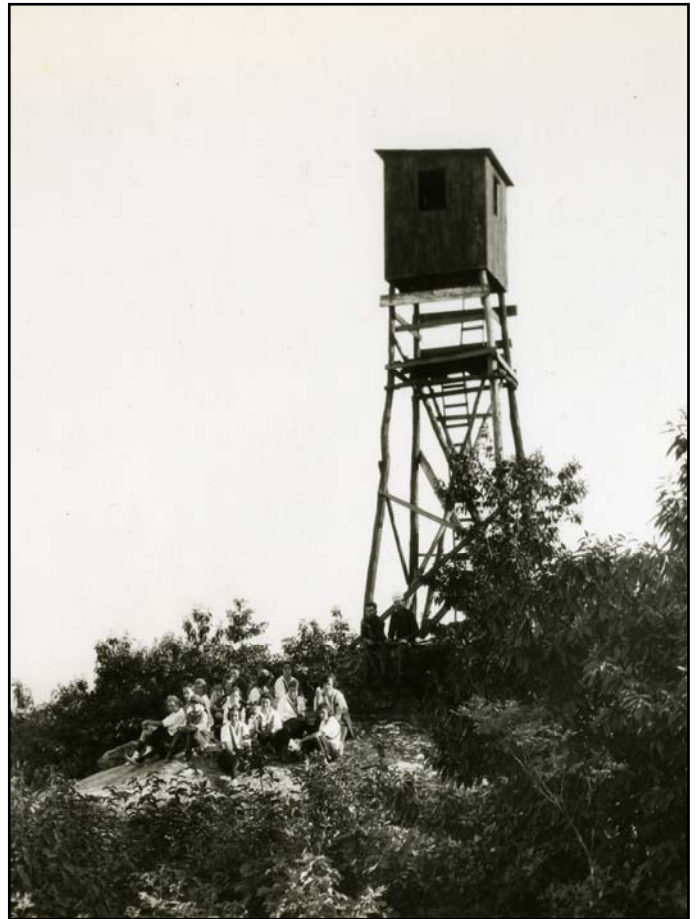
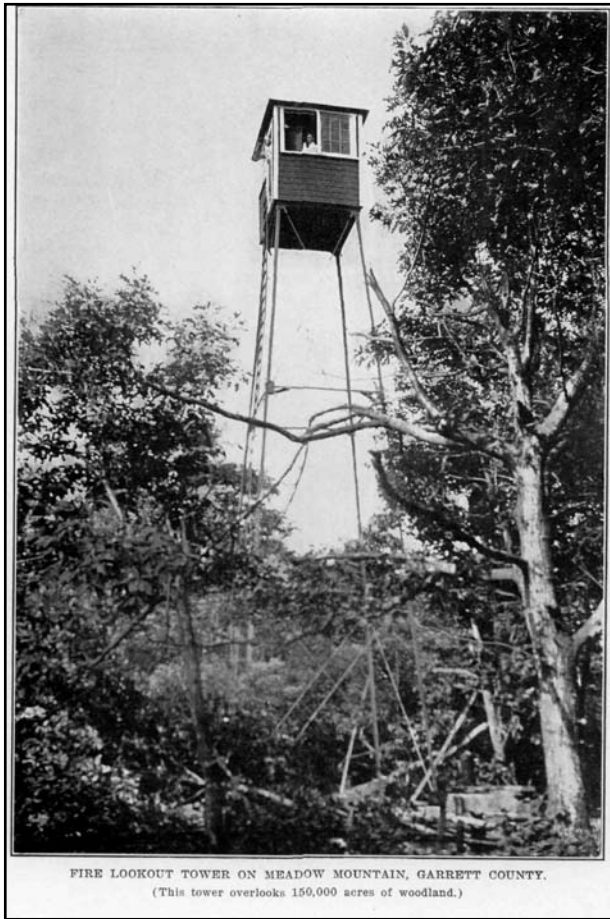
Introduction

The protection of forests from fire has always been a very important element of forestry work. Back in the days before coast-to-coast satellite imagery, before every county was crisscrossed by roads, and before every vehicle had a cell phone, getting early warning of forest fires was a very serious challenge. The best solution then was to establish a state-wide cadre of dedicated forest wardens who were constantly on the lookout for fires. It was often the responsibility of those wardens to respond to fires, and to alert and deploy as many hand “registered crews” as could quickly be brought together to control fires once they were discovered.

During the early years of the 20th century, the Maryland State Board of Forestry began looking at ways to further reduce fire danger. A major element in that effort was construction of lookout towers that would increase the effectiveness of the forest warden’s efforts. Maryland’s first forestry lookout tower was constructed atop Meadow Mountain in 1915. It was originally envisioned that 30 to 35 towers would be erected at various high points around the State. According to information included in the various annual “Reports of the State Department of Forestry,” eleven towers were installed between 1915 and 1927, 30 towers were in place by 1937, and 32 were operating by 1940. Those figures demonstrate that towers were being installed at a rapid rate between 1915 and the mid thirties, but the pace slowed as World War II gained momentum. That reflects different war time priorities, budgets and manpower resources, but it also reflects having reached the initial goal of the state-wide system of 30 to 35 towers that the Department of Forestry initially proposed.

Maryland’s first towers were wooden structures on spindly metal legs. Guy wires were required to keep them erect. Maryland’s first Forestry Tower, the Meadow Mountain tower, is shown in a photograph on the next page as it was constructed in 1915. Comparing that image to the photographs of the modern towers given in the following text clearly demonstrates the differences in design and construction. The “second generation” towers were generally fabricated by Aermotor of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and designed to be shipped in and put together onsite. They were of steel lattice design with an inside wooden stairway leading to a glass enclosed cab at the top. Some cabs had a “widow’s walk on the flat roof. The height of each tower was designed to suit local topography and to maximize visibility. With the exception of the original Dan’s Rock Tower, which was only 15 feet tall, State forestry towers typically ranged from 50 to 120 feet tall. When it was erected, the 120 foot Nassawango Tower was the tallest forestry lookout tower in the United States. Table 1 provides the height and condition of the State owned towers that were erected on land now managed by DNR. Some of the original towers were replaced in later years, or their legs were lengthened to increase their elevation and expand the area of visibility. During the years of Civilian Conservation Corps operation, the CCC installed many of Maryland’s towers.

During World War II the lookout towers also served as spotter posts for aircraft identification. By the late 1950s, the importance of towers was waning, and they were no longer manned on a regular basis. At that time forestry towers were already being turned to use as platforms for communications equipment. Initially, the equipment was typically owned and operated by the Forest Service, the Park Service or another of Maryland’s natural resource agencies, often in tandem with ATT or Western Union, but ultimately they came to serve as vital communications links for all State agencies, many federal agencies, as well as local governments. In addition, tower sites have frequently found use as Maryland Forest Service Regional Offices, field offices or storage facilities.



Early Maryland Forestry Towers. Original Meadow Mountain tower on left, constructed in 1915. Snaggy Hill Forestry Tower on right, constructed at about the same time. Note differing methods of construction. The Snaggy Mountain Tower was actually in West Virginia, located on land leased by the State of Maryland. It could only be accessed by a road running west from Swallow Falls State Park. As the photograph reproduced above (taken in 1921) clearly shows, that tower was a makeshift affair that was not an Aeromotor kit.

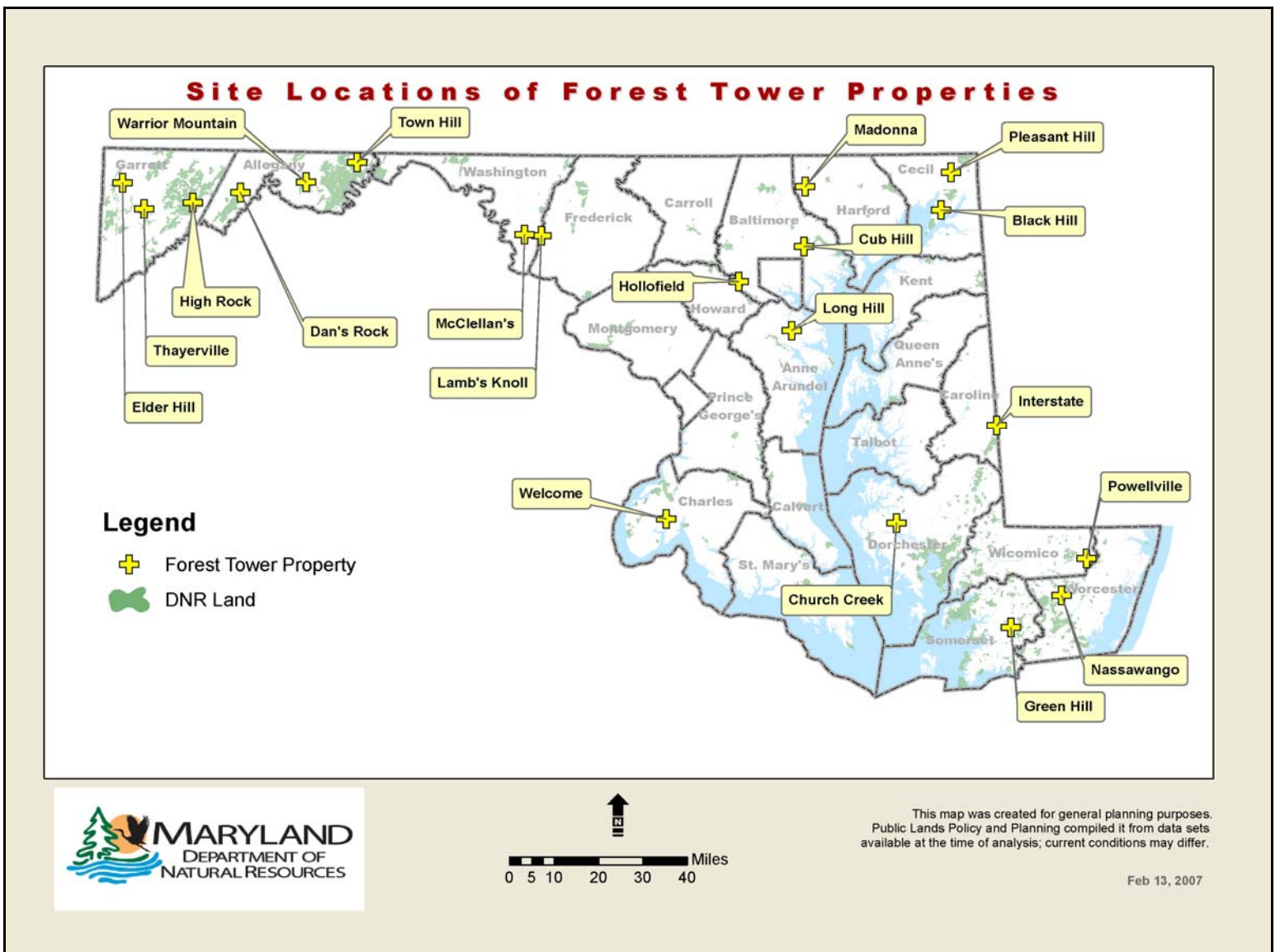
Over the years ownership of a number of DNR towers and/or tower sites were transferred. This report includes only those towers and tower properties that were managed by DNR as of December 2006. The following towers were moved from their original location and now reside at other sites.

- Brandywine Forestry Tower. Property was transferred to the University of Maryland. The tower now resides at the Fairview Outdoor Education Center, Clear Spring, Washington County, Maryland.
- Great Mills Forestry Tower. Property was transferred to St. Mary's County. The tower now resides at the Lathrop E. Smith Environmental Education Center in Rockville, Montgomery County, Maryland.
- Hollofield Forestry Tower. Property has been retained by DNR (Patapsco Valley SP), the upper portion of the tower without the cab is now an observation platform at the Merkle NRMA.
- Quantico Forestry Tower. The property was transferred, and the tower now resides at Chesapeake Fire Museum in Hebron, Wicomico County, Maryland.

The following pages provide descriptions of all Forestry Towers and Forestry Tower properties presently managed by DNR, along with management recommendations based on current information.

Also included are location maps and photographs (2006). The towers are arranged alphabetically by Region, as listed in the Table of Contents. A synopsis of pertinent information is given in Table 1 and the statewide location of all DNR Forestry Towers is shown below.

In some instances the land on which towers were constructed came to the State with deed stipulations that specify reversion of the property to the heirs or assigns of the original owners if the property should no longer be used for forestry management purposes. Such clauses are present on at least some of the deeds for the Church Creek, Interstate, Nassawango, Longhill, Welcome, Elder Hill, Town Hill, and Warrior Mountain tower sites. Maintaining DNR communications equipment on the towers, or at those tower sites, fulfills that requirement. One of the three deeds for the Nassawango Forestry Tower requires that the actual tower itself remain onsite or the property will revert. In addition, the High Rock and Thayerville Towers are situated on LU Tracts, which require appropriate use or the property could revert to the Federal Government. Since both of those sites are imbedded within large tracts of Public Land, the federal requirements should be met even if all communications use is ended and the towers removed.



Synopsis of useful information on DNR Forestry Towers and Forestry Tower Properties.

Tower Name and County	Forestry Tower Present	Height	Forestry Tower Condition	Other Tower Present	Field Office Present	Communication Equipment Present	Reversion Clause
Eastern Region	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Church Creek (DO)	Yes	120'	Good	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Green Hill (SO)	Yes	120'	Fair	No	No	No	No
Interstate (CA)	Yes	120'	Fair	No	No	No	Yes
Nassawango (WO)	Yes	120'	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Powellville (WI)	Yes	145'	Fair	Yes	No	No	No
Central Region	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black Hill (CE)	Yes	110'	Fair	No	Yes	No	No
Cub Hill (BA)	Yes	125'	Good	No	Yes	Yes	No
Hollofield (HO)	No	N/A	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No
Madonna (HA)	No	N/A	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Pleasant Hill (CE)	No	N/A	N/A	No	No	No	No
Southern Region	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Longhill (AN)	Yes	90+	Poor	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Welcome (CH)	Yes	120'	Fair	No	No	Yes	Yes
Western Region	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dans Rock (AL)	Yes	90+	Poor	No	No	Yes	No
Elder Hill (GA)	Yes	110'	Good	No	No	Yes	Yes
High Rock (GA)	Yes	90+	Good	No	No	Yes	(LU Tract)
Lamb's Knoll (WA)	No	N/A	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	No
McClellan's Lookout(WA)	No	N/A	N/A	No	No	No	No
Thayerville (GA)	Yes	90+	Good	Yes	No	Yes	(LU Tract)
Town Hill (AL)	Yes	80'	Good	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Warrior Mountain (AL)	No	N/A	N/A	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Recommendations

- Engineering and Construction should conduct a structural analysis of all DNR Forestry Towers to determine if any are in need of repair. If so, repairs should be implemented, or unsound towers should be removed.
- All DNR Forestry Towers should be assessed to determine if they are eligible for either the Maryland or National Register of Historic Places.
- One or more Forestry Towers should be restored and made available to the public for interpretive purposes. Ideally, it should be possible for visitors to climb a tower and stand in the cab. However, should that not be feasible, consideration should be given to recovering and restoring a cab from another tower and mounting it on a low platform as part of the interpretive exhibit.
- Reverter Clauses in the deeds of DNR Forestry Towers require that the property be used for forestry management purposes, or the land will revert to the heirs and assigns of the original owners. Forest Service operations at those sites, including DNR communications, fulfill that requirement. However, if any tower sites are excess to the needs of DNR, consideration should be given to allowing them to revert, or to be declared 'excess' and sold.

- A survey of all existing forestry towers should be conducted to determine what communication equipment is now present.
- If a site has been determined not to be useful for state communications purposes, its use as a private communication site should be assessed.