

USDA, Forest Service Cherokee National Forest

NEWS

News Contact:

Terry Bowerman -423.638.4109

Terry McDonald -423.476.9700



2800 Ocoee Street North
Cleveland, TN 37312

Pinnacle Mountain Fire Lookout Tower Partnership

CLEVELAND, TN – April 19, 2010 ... *The Partners of the Cherokee National Forest*, local groups, individuals and organizations are partnering with the USDA, Forest Service to help rehabilitate the historic Pinnacle Mountain Fire Lookout Tower. The tower is located atop Buffalo Mountain on the Unicoi and Washington county line in the Cherokee National Forest. The Tower is a highly visible landmark along the I-26 corridor between Erwin and Johnson City.

The historic Pinnacle Mountain Fire Lookout Tower served as sentinel for the Cherokee National Forest for over 75 years. Built during the Civil Conservation Corps days, Pinnacle Mountain Tower was decommissioned from fire detection in 1989. The Town of Unicoi, located at the base of Buffalo Mountain, has embraced Pinnacle Mountain Tower for its historical significance and the opportunity it brings for area tourism and outdoor recreation users.

After years of exposure to the elements and non-use, the Tower is in need of repair. Efforts are underway to raise funds and gather materials for the Tower's new life as a public observation site. The goal is for Pinnacle Tower to become a public observation site and destination for a hiking/biking trail system on Buffalo Mountain. Forest Service officials say that thanks to a three year public– private partnership the project is becoming a reality.

The first phase of the project was to evaluate the existing condition of the tower and develop the architectural design for its rehabilitation. These plans are currently being finalized so the reconstruction phase can begin later this year.

Another component of the project includes the development a 5-mile non-motorized trail connecting the Pinnacle Mountain Fire Tower to the trailhead recently constructed on property owned by the Town of Unicoi. The trailhead is located at the future site of the Tanasi Arts & Heritage Center near Interstate 26 at Exit 32. The 4-foot wide connector trail will be developed by improving existing routes and constructing new trail segments to reach the tower on a climbing grade suitable for hiking and biking. Volunteers from the surrounding communities contributed to the design and layout of the trail.

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The trail component of the project is currently being solicited for contractor bids and should be completed later this year. After it is completed, the trail will connect the citizens and visitors of Unicoi and Washington counties with the fire tower, a landmark that is visible along I-26 and prominently displayed on the Town of Unicoi's welcome signs.

Unicoi County Mayor, Greg Lynch said, "Pinnacle Lookout Tower has become a well known icon in Unicoi County and the local region. I am very interested in this project and recognize both the historic value and potential economic impacts of this project. The partnerships that have been established as a result of this effort are amazing. People have not only contributed funds but time and work on the ground to this effort. I consider this an outstanding example of a community pride project. This is going to be something that people in Unicoi County and northeast Tennessee for that matter will utilize and be proud of in the years to come."

Partners of the Cherokee National Forest, a nonprofit organization, has played a valuable role in building support for the entire project. The Partners have been able to solicit financial and in-kind contributions to develop plans for reconstructing the fire tower stairway and observation area. The *Partners* in cooperation with the Tanasi Arts & Heritage Center and Farmhouse Gallery hosted a "Tower Raising" fund raiser event in November 2009 at the Farmhouse Gallery in Unicoi, TN.

Cherokee National Forest Supervisor, Tom Speaks said, "This is a tremendous project with community leaders, individuals, businesses, groups and organizations in the area coming together for a common goal. I appreciate the dedication and hard work of all those who have been involved with this project. *The Partners of the Cherokee National Forest* and various groups and community leaders in the area have played a very important role of helping to lead the way and for building support for the project. This is the type of project that we can all be proud of."

Much like the function of historic lighthouses to the nation's coastal waters, fire towers exemplify the heritage of fire protection and communication. Individuals, elected officials, groups, businesses and *The Partners of Cherokee National Forest*, are leading the effort to make Pinnacle Fire Lookout Tower a proud reminder of the past and a sentinel for the Cherokee National Forest and surrounding communities.

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