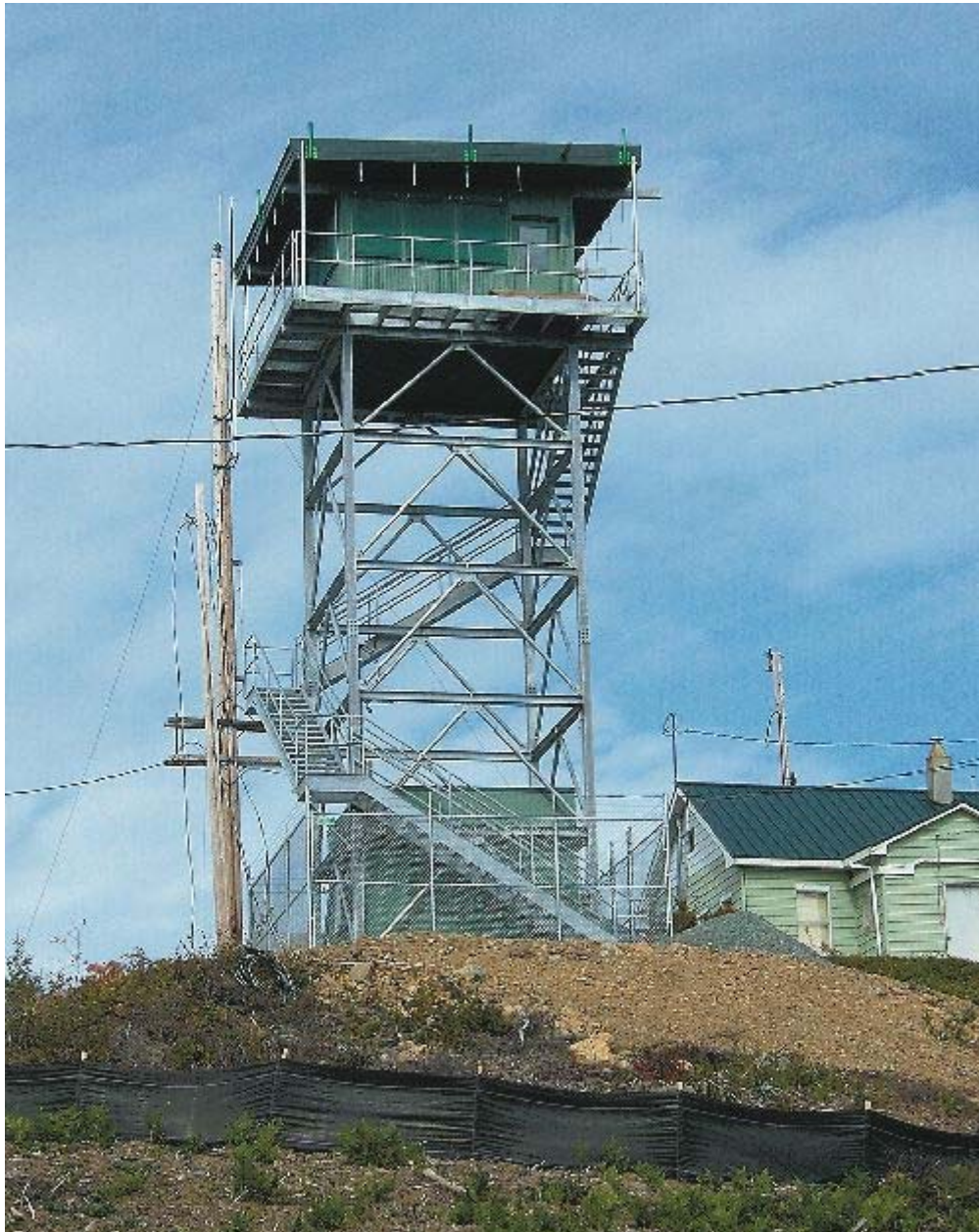


Steel lookout growing on Sexton

By Jeff Duetel of the Daily Courier

The most important lookout in Josephine County for spotting wildfires is 95 percent complete, on top of Mount Sexton, said Rick Dryer, Grants Pass Unit forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The all-steel, 40-foot tower replaces the wooden one built in 1963 that was burned down by arsonists on March 31, 2006. The new structure provides a wide view from a 3,950-foot summit about 12 miles north of Grants Pass, and it's fireproof.



"Sexton looks over our most populated area," Dryer said.

The past two summers ODF sent people to the summit during lightning storms, and the construction workers also were available to spot fires, Dryer said.

Ausland Construction of Grants Pass built the tower for \$345,000. It's an exact replica of the previous one, anchored to a concrete slab. Only a few minor parts of the 14-by-14 lookout are not made of steel, Dryer said, adding that a wood version would have cost \$375,000.

The arson fire that destroyed the lookout and damaged radio equipment has not been solved, Dryer said.

ODF condemned the Peavine Mountain lookout two years ago and Manzanita last year, so was down to one functioning lookout in Josephine County this past year, at Little Grayback east of Cave Junction.

Manzanita Lookout, about 12 miles southwest of Grants Pass, was condemned because of deteriorating support beams, as was Peavine. The ODF was able to use the former Forest Service lookout on Onion Mountain, and may again next year. The Forest Service had been renting out the Onion Mountain Lookout to sightseers.

The ODF may begin using remote camera lookouts beginning next year, something already taking place in Douglas County. Manzanita is a likely site, Dryer said, because rebuilding a manned site would be far more difficult than replacing Sexton's lookout, which has a good road leading to it.

"There's no easy way to get to Manzanita," Dryer said.

The remote camera would need only a small enclosed tower, so materials would be easier to transport on primitive roads. It would cost \$50,000 to \$75,000.

"It would be a whole lot cheaper than building a whole new lookout," Dryer said.

The camera system rotates 360 degrees, and is monitored at a remote site. The system sends out an audible alarm when smoke is detected, and it can tell the difference between smoke and dust, Dryer said.

Dryer said ODF hopes to use Onion Mountain again next summer, giving it Onion, Sexton and Little Grayback. There are four more lookouts in Jackson County operated by the ODF, at Tallowbox Mountain near Ruch, Soda Mountain east of Ashland, Round Top above the Evans Valley and White Point near Prospect.

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