

FY2019 Lolo NF HSE Project- Skookum Butte Lookout Rehabilitation Passport in Time (PIT)



Skookum Butte Lookout is located at the Montana/Idaho Stateline on the Missoula Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest. This year \$20,000 in Heritage Stewardship Enhancement (HSE) money was awarded in order to initiate the process of restoring this unique 'Grange Hall', or L-5 style lookout. Several partners; including Passport in Time (PIT) volunteers, Forest Fire Lookout Association (FFLA), the Missoula Chapter of Backcountry Horsemen (BCH) and the Region One Historic Preservation Team

completed the first successful rehabilitation project at the lookout.

Prior to project onset, Missoula RD Recreation staff located several standing lodgepole pine matching the dimensions needed to replace the deteriorated logs forming the lookout's base. The Missoula Helitack Crew delivered the logs to the trailhead/staging area and hauled the logs, two at a time via helicopter, right outside the front door. They also delivered 80 gallons of drinking water to the site. From July 8-19, 2019, Jack Poppen of the R1 Preservation Team provided project oversight with assistance from recently retired FS employee Doug Hunt (paid for with HSE



funding) while Lolo NF Archaeologist Sydney Bacon assisted in coordination and administration.



Work accomplished during the two weeks focused on replacing nine of the 10 logs on both the south (front) and west sides of the lookout. These two sides had received the brunt of 91 years of weathering and were in the worst shape. A makeshift workspace was set up using the lookout's shutters, creating the only even surface on site. Logs were peeled using drawknives,

and the top and bottoms were trimmed using a single bit axe and broad axe. The occasional power tool was used in a pinch. Although we were thankful the logs were not coped like Big Hole Peak Lookout, considerable time was spent measuring the logs and hand-hewing them to match closely with the logs that were replaced. The logs were attached at either end by mortise and tenons into the corner post, not very common to lookouts; and work had to be thought out from the top log down. Missoula BCH hauled all 19 windows down on their pack mules as well as brought up all the plywood needed to cover the openings. The windows are scheduled for rehabilitation over the winter at the R1 Preservation Team's shop.



HSE dollars were used to hire FS Retiree and seasoned cook Byron Williams. Byron had plenty of water, cooking space and mosquitoes to keep him company at the Skookum Butte Lookout Trailhead. His meals were a delicious treat at the end of a long work day and steep hike back down to camp.

We had several visitors during the project; including Carolyn Upton, Forest Supervisor; Greg Gustina, Staff Officer; Jen Hensiek, Missoula District Ranger; Kate Jerman, Public

Affairs Officer; the entire Missoula Ranger District Recreation staff, six Grants and Agreements staff members and a handful of other forest employees. Reporters from the Missoulian Newspaper and online media forum The Missoula Current paid us a visit and provided accurate and encouraging stories about the work conducted during the week. A few passionate retirees interested in the restoration work paid us a visit, including Milo McLeod, former Forest Archaeologist, and Libby Langston, former Fire Prevention Officer (and lookout fanatic).

Aside from the HSE funding and PIT volunteer force, the success in planning and executing this undertaking was due to Jack Poppen and Doug Hunt's expert skills and patience and willingness to pass their knowledge on to the volunteers working on site.

It is likely that the project will take three years to complete. For FY2020, Phase II of the Skookum Butte Lookout Rehabilitation is proposed, with continued support from HSE funding, PIT, FFLA, Missoula BCH. The lookout restored to its historic appearance may, upon completion, become a candidate for the Lolo NF Cabin Rental Program.