

USFS plans to move historic Tahoe fire lookout



This U.S. Forest Service fire lookout may be moved to Spooner Summit. Photo/USFS

By Kathryn Reed

Technology has almost rendered fire lookouts obsolete. Still, there is one from the 1930s that is going to get a new lease on life in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The U.S. Forest Service wants to move the Zephyr Point lookout to White Hill, which is above the agency's firehouse at Spooner Summit. This is where the old White Hill ski lift was located.

The wooden structure was built in 1932. It was staffed through the late 1960s. After that fire crews would go to the lookout when thunderstorms rolled through to see if lightning had ignited a fire.

More recently telecommunication equipment was stored at the lookout, but that use has since ended.

"The current location is a somewhat urban industrial location. At one time it was in a remote spot on a mountain," John Maher, USFS heritage resources program manager, told *Lake*

Tahoe News. "Now it's on private property and we don't have easy access to it."

In 1997, the fire lookout was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. One reason for not just dismantling the lookout is because of the historical significance.

Maher described the lookout as "in better than moderate condition, not excellent condition."

There are strict guidelines as to improvements that can be made based on its being a historical structure.

"We also want it to be functional," Maher said. "It would be used probably during thunderstorms to look for lightning-started fires."

Plus, moving the lookout will allow public access. No new trails are planned. However, the current road would likely need to be improved so Forest Service employees could access it.

Maher said it's possible the snowmobile tours out of Zephyr Cove could use the lookout as a stop.

The cost to build a foundation, move the lookout and add interpretive signs is estimated to be a little more than \$10,000. Not all of the money is in hand. Once the forest supervisor has signed the environmental assessment it is predicted that money could become available.

The Forest Service also plans to work with the National Historic Lookout Register, which enlists volunteers to help with such relocation projects.

The other lookout in the basin, but also is not staffed, is at Angora on the South Shore.

The Forest Service is studying the environment aspects of the project now. Comments will be taken until Dec. 13. More info

is available online. Depending on the comments received, a decision by the forest supervisor could be made by mid-February.