

Tower: 'We've got the tools and volunteers ready to bring it back'

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ripped out the old roof, and installed a temporary one. They painted the exterior to seal it from the weather, and battened down the lookout for the winter.

Planning to resume the work the following summer, they left their tools and bundles of cedar roof shingles.

Little did they know that administrative permission would delay their return, putting the restoration of Bull of the Woods on hold for the next 16 years.

The Bull Complex fire

When last spring arrived, Allen was excited. He had lined up a series of summer projects for the Sand Mountain Society volunteers, culminating with a big work session over Labor Day weekend. At long last, he'd gotten the go-ahead to return to Bull of the Woods.

As they prepared for their return, the summer grew

increasingly hot and dry, spiking several days above 100, and setting historic records.

On Aug. 2, lightning struck the Bull of the Woods Wilderness, igniting the dry forest in several locations. The individual fires soon spread, creating the Bull Complex fire.

Fire crews were rallied and fire management plans quickly drawn up. Within the discussions, the Forest Service Heritage Resource team identified key historic structures to focus protective efforts.

They reached out to Sand Mountain Society and reassured them that the Bull of the Woods Lookout was on that list.

The plan was to dispatch small crews to wrap the structures in fire-resistant material and to clear away the perimeter of trees and brush. This had been done to the Bull of the Woods Lookout during the 2011 Motherload fire.

A mission was set up to fly a crew to the lookout on Aug.

14, but called off due to conditions. The team mobilized the next day, but conditions were still deemed unsafe.

Fire managers turned their efforts to wrapping other significant historic sites. Fire crews wrapped the buildings and bridges at Bagby Hot Springs, Hawk Mountain Lookout Cabin and the Gold Butte Lookout, which the Sand Mountain Society had restored.

Fire managers waited for an opportunity to dispatch a crew to wrap the Bull of the Woods Lookout.

Members of the Sand Mountain Society checked the updates on the fire incident maps, growing increasingly anxious as they watched fire advance toward the lookout. They sent a flurry of emails, offering to help and imploring the Forest Service to make every possible effort to save the historic lookout.

By the final week of August, the fire was within a half-mile of the lookout.

It was clear that favorable weather conditions and personnel availability were not going to align in time to send a crew to wrap the lookout tower.

Fire managers launched a new tactic. For six days, helicopters dropped water in an attempt to slow the fire's march toward the tower.

On the last day of August, a helicopter flew to the site, where a rappelling fire crew cleared trees and brush around the lookout.

By Labor Day weekend, the smoke engulfed the lookout. Burning embers rained down on the lookout's uncovered roof.

Allen continued exchanging texts with the lookout ranger stationed on Sand Mountain. "Looks like the Bull is going to get it," he wrote.

Allen's father and the lookout had grown old together. When Allen Jr. first saw the Bull of the Woods Lookout, they were both teenagers: he

was 18 years old; the lookout was 17 years old. Now, Allen Jr. was 80 years old, and the tower, 79. They were both a little more frail.

This summer, Allen Jr. had been finding it harder to make the long uphill hikes to lookout peaks and perform the physically-demanding construction labor. If his days restoring lookouts with his son were drawing to an end, restoring Bull of the Woods would have been his perfect swan song.

On the evening of Sept. 2, Allen and his father watched a bank of smoke rising from the flank of Mount Hood. Having both been trained as lookouts and in fire science, they knew how to read the smoke and what the wind direction meant for the fate of the lookout tower. They didn't need to say a word, and watched the smoke in silence.

The last lookout stands

Mt. Hood National Forest once had more than 80 look-

out towers. With the loss of the Bull of the Woods Lookout, six remain.

"I'm feeling guilty," Allen said. "Because people look to me to help save these last places. And I keep asking myself if I did enough or what else could I have done."







He is devastated by the loss, but not deterred. After all, when the Sand Mountain Lookout burned to the ground, from the ashes rose the Sand Mountain Society.

The transplanted and restored lookout tower on Sand Mountain is considered a historic restoration tour de force. It is staffed by the Forest Service as well as a rotation of Sand Mountain Society volunteers, including Allen Jr.

"It's unlikely to get permission from the Forest Service to rebuild Bull of the Woods," Allen said. "But I'm kind of a dreamer. And if they do give us the ok, we've got the tools and volunteers ready to bring it back."

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