

NEEDLES FIRE LOOKOUT

WESTERN DIVIDE RANGER DISTRICT

GIANT SEQUOIA NATIONAL MONUMENT

SEQUOIA NATIONAL FOREST

The Needles is located off of Western Divide Highway, on the Western Divide Ranger District within the Giant Sequoia National Monument on the Sequoia National Forest. This site is a unique monolith granite rock formation with several spires and faces, each being quite different than the other in size and shape. The Needles Fire Lookout Tower, which sat on top of a spire referred to as "The Magician" was destroyed in a structure fire on July 28, 2011. No one was injured in this tragic event.

The question on everybody's mind is whether the tower will be rebuilt, and if so, what will it take? The first priority is to remove the charred debris from the top of the rock. Some of the materials in or under the tower that burned were batteries and propane tanks that charged radios and other communication devices in the tower. These items, some of which are considered hazardous material, should be removed by the end of July, 2012.

Forest Officials will continue to keep the area adjacent to the rock formation where the tower was perched closed for public safety until the charred debris can be safely removed and hauled away. The closure area is located on a single spire commonly referred to as "The Magician." It includes a 100-foot buffer around the base of the spire and the stairs.

The Needles Road 21S05 and trail 32E22 that leads to the site has been re-opened for hikers and rock climbers to access the area outside this closure. The area is accessible from May to October, depending on weather.

There are many steps to consider and complete should the Forest Service propose to construct a new tower.



An assessment of the rock and foundation where the tower once sat will be necessary to determine its integrity to support a new structure.

New building requirements will need to be researched and considered in any design.

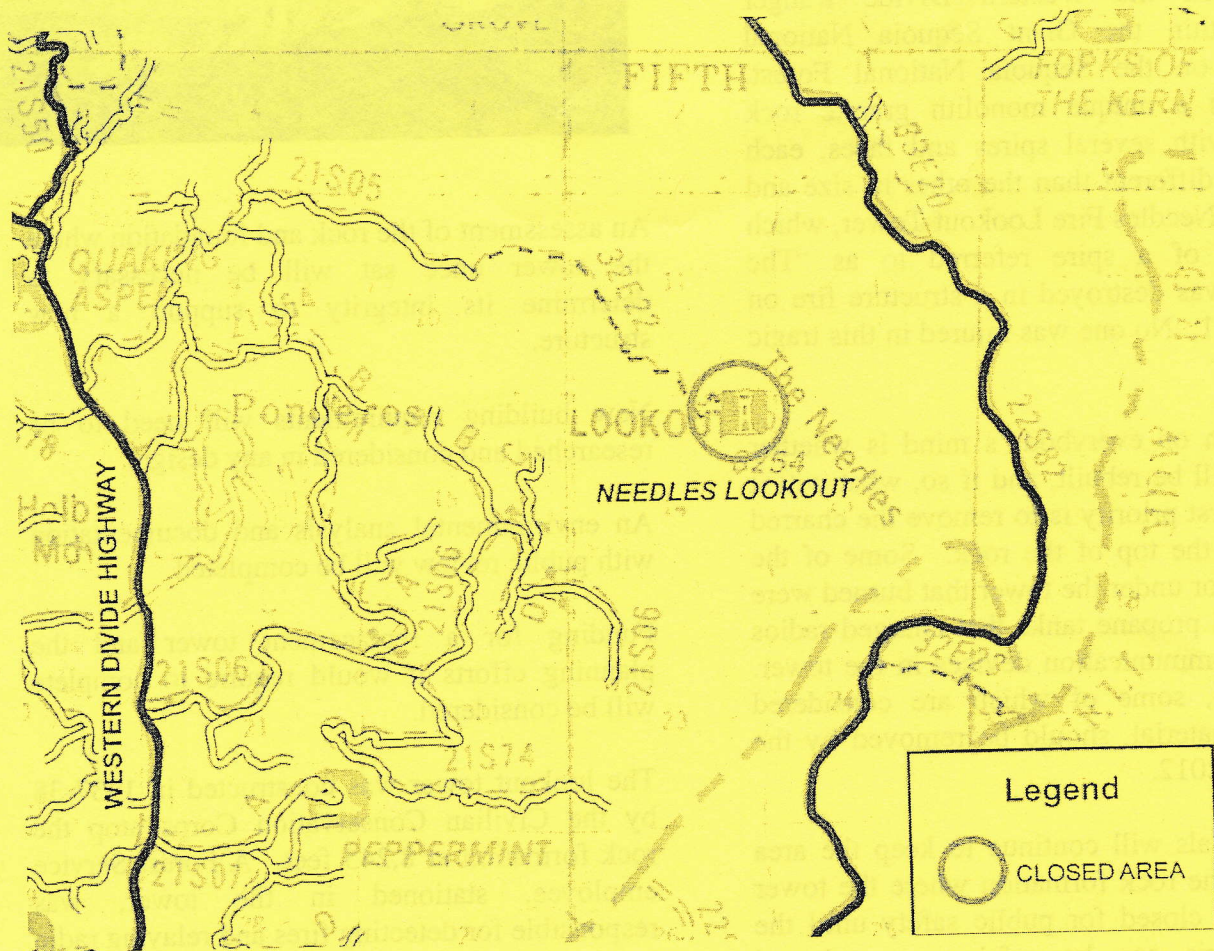
An environmental analysis and documentation with public review will be completed.

Funding for a replacement tower and the planning efforts it would require to complete will be considered.

The lookout tower was constructed in 1937-38 by the Civilian Conservation Corps atop the rock formation at 8,245 feet. A Forest Service employee, stationed in the tower, was responsible for detecting fires and relaying radio messages to a dispatcher, who in turn sent firefighters and support equipment to extinguish the reported fire. The employee who worked in the Needles tower has been reassigned to another lookout tower on the District.

Needles overlooked the Kern River Drainage, Mt. Whitney, Olancho Peak, Farewell Gap, and Dome Rock. The tower was the primary communication line for persons in the backcountry where cell phones do not work. The Needles Lookout Tower was one of the most popular places to visit on the Western Divide Ranger District.

The rock formation that the lookout is perched upon is used for rock climbing and has become popular over the past 20 years. Several books and publications have been written on The Needles. Most rock climbers access the Needles from the top, off of Western Divide Highway. Rock climbers have given names to the various rock formations, such as Sorcerer, Wizard, and Witch. The Needles Fire Lookout was perched atop what is known as "The Magician". Rock formations known as Voodoo and Demon Dome are accessed for climbing from the east at the base of the rock formation, just off of Lloyd Meadow Road.



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