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Ross Whaley, Chairman
Adirondack Park Agency
P.O. Box 99
Ray Brook, NY 12977

Re: Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower and the
Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area Unit Management Plan

Dear Dr. Whaley,

I am writing to express our continued support for the retention and preservation of the fire observation tower on Hurricane Mountain.

Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH) is the nonprofit, historic preservation organization for the Adirondack Park with a mission to promote better public understanding, appreciation, and stewardship of the region's architecture, historic sites, and communities. With a membership of more than 1000, AARCH fulfills its mission through educational programs and publications, by providing technical assistance, through advocacy, and by restoring and managing historic sites through partnership arrangements. AARCH has encouraged the preservation of fire observation towers in the region for many years, beginning with our involvement with the Blue Mountain Fire Tower Restoration Committee nearly ten years ago. In 2000, we successfully nominated ten New York State fire towers to the National Register of Historic Places and made it possible for other towers in the region to be added to the Register. Currently we are actively involved in the preservation of four regional fire towers – on Poke-O-Moonshine Mountain, Mt. Arab, Bald Mountain, and Azure Mountain – through our sponsorship of the *Friends of Poke-O-Moonshine*, *Friends of Mt. Arab*, *Friends of Bald Mountain*, and *Azure Mountain Friends*.

The fire observation station on Hurricane Mountain is an historic site with great historic and engineering significance. It was made by the Aeromotor Corporation of Chicago and was erected by the state in 1919. The station was one of more than fifty in the region that were developed during the early 20th century to detect and protect the forested land of the Adirondacks. This detection and protection system, which included state forest rangers, fire observers, other state personnel, local fire departments, and thousands of other individuals, was an innovative and effective means of protecting the region's great natural resources. The observers played an

important role in detecting and fighting forest fires and were often effective conservation educators for the public who hiked to these mountaintops. Twelve state fire observation stations have already been placed on the National Register of Historic Places and, with a few exceptions, all others, including the tower on Hurricane Mountain, have been determined to be eligible for the National Register.

The fire tower on Hurricane Mountain can continue to have an important public recreation and education value. Like the preserved fire towers on Poke-O-Moonshine, Goodnow, Blue, Hadley, Cathedral Rocks, Snowy, Mt. Arab, Kane, and others, a restored Hurricane Mountain fire tower can be used to interpret the natural and cultural history of the Forest Preserve to visitors to the mountain. NYSDEC Region 5's *Wildland Fire Protection Management Plan* (2004) also anticipates developing a staffing program for its fire towers, during higher fire danger periods. Both of these uses justify retaining the tower. The preservation of this fire tower also has broad public support, as evidenced by the more than 1800 signatures gathered by the "Friends of Hurricane Mountain," by resolutions by Essex County and others. All of this shows that there is more than sufficient public interest in preserving and maintaining this station and in using it for public educational purposes, that this undertaking is feasible and practical.

The retention and preservation of the tower could also be accomplished within the framework of the State Land Master Plan, if the immediate area around the tower were reclassified as Historic. This is an effective, legal mechanism for preserving historic sites within the Adirondack Forest Preserve and, as you know, is the same classification used at Camp Santanoni, John Brown's Farm, and the Crown Point State Historic Site. Because the tower would be used for public recreation and education purposes, its presence would not be in conflict with other public uses of the surrounding area. We encourage the Department and other involved state agencies to make the preservation and public use of this tower possible by reclassifying the area around the tower as Historic and by including language supporting the retention and preservation of the tower in the Unit Management Plan for the Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area.

Please feel free to call me if you have questions or comments about these remarks.

Sincerely,

Steven Engelhart
Executive Director

Cc: Denise Sheehan, Commissioner, NYSDEC
Chuck Vandrei, NYSDEC
Lynn Garofalini, NYSOPRHP
Stuart Buchanan, NYSDEC
Sen. Elizabeth Little
Teresa Sayward