Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower, Wind Cave National Park
Assessment of Qualification for Listing on National Register of Historic Places

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The Rankin Ridge Fire Tower is located in the northwestern portion of Wind Cave National Park. Situated at an elevation of 5,013 feet, the highest point in the national park, the tower provides a panoramic view of southeastern Black Hills and the surrounding Great Plains. It was constructed in 1956 and remained in regular use during fire seasons until 1998. As the National Park Service (NPS) notes, "public access to the catwalk around the tower and the inside of the tower has been limited [since 1998]. The public was last able to visit the top of the tower during the park's centennial celebration in 2003. Currently, the tower is only used sporadically to look for fires or to monitor severe weather conditions."[1]

Naming Rankin Ridge and Planning for a Lookout Tower

The Rankin Ridge area became part of the national park on August 1946 when more than 16,000 acres of the former Custer Recreation Demonstration Area (RDA) were added to Wind Cave, increasing the total acreage of the park from 11,718 to 28,059 acres. Following this significant expansion, and in anticipation of the park's upcoming 50th anniversary in 1953, Superintendent Earl M. Semingsen proposed naming this highpoint in the recently expanded park after Wind Cave's first superintendent: William A. Rankin. The name "Rankin Ridge" was formally proposed to the Domestic Names Committee of the United States Board on Geographic Names in November 1951. A few weeks later, on 4 January 1952, Rankin Ridge received its official geographic designation.[2]

The initial plans to locate a fire lookout tower on Rankin Ridge date back to 1939, when the area was within the Custer RDA. Managed by the National Park Service through the Recreational Demonstration Area Program, the Custer RDA was comprised of lands acquired from private owners and designated for rehabilitation as park lands and wildlife habitat. The proposed lookout tower would not have been officially attached to Wind Cave National Park or Custer State Park, but would have been part of a broader network of lookout towers and fire suppression programs connected with the national park, the state park, and the part of the Black Hills National Forest that was then known as the Harney National Forest.[3] If constructed, it could have been built by workers from

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[1] *Wind Cave National Park: Silent Sentinel Marks Fiftieth Anniversary*, 31 August 2007 <http://www.nps.gov/wica/parknews/silent-sentinel-marks-fiftieth-anniversary.htm> (accessed 13 September 2010).
[2] Correspondence related to the naming of Rankin Ridge is in F Ref 1943, Folder 3 "History File, Bohi," Wind Cave National Park Archives (hereafter WCNP Archives).
[3] The Black Hills Forest Reserve was established in 1897, and redesignated the Black Hills National Forest in 1907. In 1911, the southern part of the Black Hills National

the CCC camp at Wind Cave National Park, the CCC camp in Custer State Park, or one of the CCC camps located with in the national forest. Cutbacks in the budgets for the Emergency Conservation Work program and the CCC prevented any planning or action for the construction of a lookout tower, and the question had become moot with the advent of World War II in 1941.[4] Continued interest in locating a lookout tower on the ridgeline was nevertheless fostered by the expectation that the area would eventually become part of the national park. However, it was not until the final disposition of the RDA lands, which were divided between Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park in 1946, that formal planning could occur.

New plans for a lookout tower coincided with the naming of Rankin Ridge. As NPS Regional Director Howard W. Baker noted in a memorandum to Director Arthur E. Demaray, the "formal proposal for the adoption of the name 'Rankin Ridge' for a topographic feature" in the park was directly tied to the expectation that the Park Service would "place a fire lookout on this ridge, and it is desirable that an official name be given to the ridge."[5] The connection between the proposed geographic name and the construction of a new lookout tower were echoed by Superintendent Semingsen. In a press release announcing the naming of Rankin Ridge, Semingsen wrote that the location had

> been considered for a number of years by the National Park Service as the most strategic point for the construction of a forest fire lookout tower. From a … steel tower erected on this point nearly 40% of the National Park would be visible along with portions of Custer State Park, the Harney National Forest, and various private lands within the [fire] protection zone. $15,000 has been requested for the construction of this forest fire lookout tower.[6]

Superintendent Semingsen had already submitted a proposal to erect a temporary lookout tower on Rankin Ridge until a more permanent structure could be planned and built. It was determined that the simple lookout tower at Elk Mountain, "a 40 foot cedar pole

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Forest, along with additional lands in the southern Black Hills, were organized into the Harney National Forest. In 1954, the Harney National Forest was integrated into the larger Black Hills National Forest. Martha Geores, *Common Ground: The Struggle for Ownership of the Black Hills National Forest* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 18-19.

[4] "Project History and Construction Report – Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower and House – Wind Cave National park PCP B-17-1," 27 November 1956, F Ref 1943, Folder 21 "Constr. Ranking Ridge Lookout Tower," WCNP Archives; *Superintendent's Annual Report: Fiscal Year 1939*, 8, 16-17 (copy in Wind Cave National Park Library.

[5] Regional Director Howard W. Baker to The Director, undated Memorandum ([November] 1951), F Ref 1943, Folder 3 "History File, Bohi," WCNP Archives.

[6] Earl M. Semingsen to Sirs, 11 February 1952. The press release was published verbatim in the *Hot Springs Star* on 14 February 1952. Copies of the press release and the news clipping in F Ref 1943, Folder 3 "History File, Bohi," WCNP Archives.

surmounted by a crow's nest," would serve this purpose and in July 1952 it was relocated to Rankin Ridge.[7]

40' Crow's Nest Lookout Tower on Elk Mountain, ca. 1930s.
Image source: Wind Cave National Park

As plans developed for the new lookout tower, park officials also intended the structure to be a feature of the visitor experience at Wind Cave National Park. Semingsen's press release enthused that, "When constructed, the tower will be open to the public for visitation where a 'birds-eye' view of the entire southern portion of the Black Hills can be seen from this location."[8] The construction of the lookout tower would also correspond with the development of an access road and parking area, as well as a self-guiding trail from the parking area to the tower. As park planners envisioned it, hikers could

[7] "Project History and Construction Report."
[8] Semingsen to Sirs, 11 February 1952.

> ascend the truck trail to the Lookout (about one-half mile). The return walk is by a foot trail to be laid out, descending the north and west slope of the ridge, about three-quarters of a mile long …. The trail users will be able to visit the lookout and learn something of fire control. It will be self-guiding through numbered stakes and a guide leaflet keyed to the stakes. Innumerable natural history and ecological features exist along the proposed route.[9]

With the temporary "Crow's Nest" tower in place, and with plans for a permanent tower, parking area, and interpretive trail in process, Superintendent Semingsen corresponded with officials in the U.S. Forest Service for recommendations on an appropriate lookout tower. In May 1955 he received a copy of basic plans and specifications from the U.S. Forest Service Chief of Fire Control for the Rocky Mountain Region. Based on this information, Semingsen submitted a Project Proposal for a 54 foot "U.S. Forest Service, Standard Steel Lookout Tower" with a 14' x 14' live-in cab. The proposal was accepted and put out for bid in October 1955 by the NPS Western Office of Design and Construction in San Francisco. The Dresser-IDECO Company of Columbus, Ohio submitted the only bid, for $9,137, which was accepted on 5 December 1955.The tower and cab components were shipped by rail on 30 April 1956 and arrived at Hot Springs on 8 May. In the meantime, the tower site on Rankin Ridge was prepared, which included some clearing and excavation as well as the construction of four reinforced concrete footings. Since no bids were received for the assembly and installation of the tower, this work was completed by park staff, who also handled the transportation of the tower and cab pieces from Hot Springs to Rankin Ridge. Work was completed on 1 September at a total cost of $14,880.89.[10]

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[9] "Master Plan Development Outline, Wind Cave National Park, South Dakota: Interpretation," 26 (November 1957), document on-file in WCNP Archives.

[10] "Project History and Construction Report;" also "Completion Report of Construction Project, NPS No. NP – WC – 3104," 20 February 1957, F Ref 1943, Folder 21 "Constr. Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower," WCNP Archives. The "Project History and Construction Report" does not give a precise date for the completion of the tower's assembly and erection, but lists a date of "about September 1, 1956."

Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower, ca. 1957.
Source: Wind Cave National Park

Steel Fire Lookout Towers and Dresser-IDECO

While fire lookout towers predate the 1905 formation of the U.S. Forest Service, they did not become common until after the "Great Fire of 1910" that burned 3 million acres in Washington, Idaho and Montana. In the aftermath, fire detection and suppression became a primary responsibility of the Forest Service. Beginning in the 1910s, lookout cabins, cupolas, and crow's nests constructed on mountaintops and ridges throughout forested sections of the United States. In the 1930s, with the onset of the Great Depression and the formation of the Civilian Conservation Corps, hundreds of new lookout towers were constructed by CCC workers across the United States in national forests, national parks, state parks and forests, and on RDA lands. Many of the New Deal era towers were constructed on site from local stone and timber. Some, like the Harney Peak and Coolidge Peak Lookout Towers, were remarkable structures. Increasingly, however, the federal government turned to the use of prefabricated steel towers.[11]

[11] Eliot W. Zimmermann, *Forest Fire Detection* (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, 1969), 5-8. Hal Rothman, *"I'll Never Fight Fire with My Bare Hands Again": Recollections of the First Foresters of the Inland Northwest* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994), 3-17; John R. Grosvenor, *A History of the Architecture of the USDA Forest Service* (N.P.: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1999), 95-

The growing reliance on steel towers, which ultimately proved less costly and easier to install than timber, stone, or concrete towers, corresponded with a tremendous growth in the number of fire towers used by state and federal agencies. By the early 1950s, when Wind Cave National Park was planning for the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower, there were 5,060 lookout towers across the country. The vast majority of these were built in the 1930s, and most of those were made of prefabricated steel. By 1967, as many as a third of the towers that existed in 1953 were gone. The total numbers had not declined by the same factor, however. Rather, many of the timber towers, as well as the older or more obsolete steel towers, had been replaced by new s Standard Steel Lookout Towers. This common pattern was echoed at Wind Cave National Park when the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower replaced the old wooden crow's nest tower.[12]

Dresser-IDECO was one of several manufacturers of prefabricated galvanized steel towers and cabs used by the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service in the 1920s and 1930s. Other companies included Aermotor, Pacific Coast Steel, and the Baker Manufacturing Company. During the New Deal era, Aermotor, which specialized in the manufacture of windmills, produced the lion's share of steel lookout towers used in the United States. In the 1950s and early 1960s, however, Dresser-IDECO manufactured an increasing number of lookout towers and began to replace Aermotor as a primary supplier of U.S. Forest Service towers. This partly reflected the gradual decline of Aermotor Windmill Company, but it mostly stemmed the Agency's need for larger lookout cabs. Because Aermotor towers were based on the dimensions of their windmills, they usually supported cabs that were only 7' x 7'. When the Forest Service turned to using more live-in cabs in the post World War II era, the 14' x 14' cabs produced by Dresser-IDECO became more appropriate.[13]

IDECO, which is an acronym for the International Derrick and Equipment Company, was founded in Columbus, Ohio in 1920 to produce steel oil well derricks. The company soon diversified and included oil drilling and production equipment, aircraft hangers, electric power sub stations, radio broadcast towers, and lookout towers. In 1944 it was acquired by Dresser Industries, a large company involved in petroleum production and transport. Dresser-IDECO became a subsidiary of the larger corporation

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105; Mark V. Thornton, "Fixed Point Fire Detection: The Lookouts" (Groveland, CA, November 1986), *passim*.

[12] Zimmermann, *Forest Fire Detection*, 5-8.

[13] Ibid.; Thornton, "Fixed Point Fire Detection," *passim*; H. R. Jones, "Recent Developments in Lookout Towers," *Fire Control Notes* 3, No. 1 (January 1939): 1-4; Kay Atwood et al, *Utility and Service Combined with Beauty: Contextual and Architectural History of USDA Forest Service Region 6: 1905-1950* ([Portland, OR]: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region, 2005), *passim*.

On IDECO, see *International Derrick & Equipment Company* (Columbus, Ohio: International Derrick & Equipment Co, 1932), *passim*.

but remained at the original IDECO headquarters in Columbus until the late 1960's.[14] Through its nearly three decades in Columbus, Dresser-IDECO branched into the manufacture of communication and television antennas and expanded its military contracting. One of the most notable structures produced by the company was the 1,527 ft. high BREN (Bare Reactor Experiment, Nevada) Tower at the Nevada Test Site. When it was first put in service in 1962 as part of the program for testing nuclear bombs, the tower was the tallest structure in the world.[15]

Though fire lookout towers were a small part of an increasingly diverse and international company, Dresser-IDECO had apparently become a favorite of the U.S. Forest Service in the early post-World War Two era. As occurred with the planning for the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower, Forest Service officials also served as a sort of unofficial government clearinghouse on information about steel towers. In 1945, for instance, they received a request from Western Union for recommendations on the construction of "a radio beam transmission tower." Forest Service Engineer H. R. Jones recommended that Western Union contact Dresser-IDECO for construction of a 14' x 14' cab, and suggested that either Dresser-IDECO or Aermotor could build an appropriate tower. The use of Dresser-IDECO 14' x 14' cabs with timber, concrete, or stone towers had become more common in the early postwar period, and Dresser-IDECO did offer cabs and towers as separate units.[16]

Standard Steel Lookout Towers

As noted above, the structure fabricated by Dresser-IDECO for Wind Cave National Park followed the specifications established for a "U.S. Forest Service, Standard Steel Lookout Tower." Also known as a "CL-100 type," as first delineated in a 1938 Forest Service publication *Standard Lookout Structure Plans*, these towers were initially

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[14] James Anthony Clark, *The Chronological History of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Industries* (New York: Clark Book, Co., 1963), 110; "Dresser Industries," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, 30 May 2010 <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/dod4.html> (accessed 23 August 2010); Darwin Payne, *Initiative in Energy: The Story of Dresser Industries, 1880–1978* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 48-62.

[15] Clark, *The Chronological History of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Industries*, 110; Payne, *Initiative in Energy: The Story of Dresser Industries, 1880–1978*, 48-62.On the BREN Tower, see "BREN Tower," *Wikipedia*, 13 August 2010 <http://en.wikivisual.com/index.php/BREN_Tower> (accessed 23 August 2010)

[16] David S. Rotenstein, "Towers for Telegrams: The Western Union Telegraph Company and the Emergence of Microwave Telecommunications Infrastructure," *IA, The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology* 32.2 (2006): 14. Also see Jones, "Recent Developments in Lookout Towers," 1-4. On the use of towers and cabs, see Katherine C. Atwood, "Historic Fire Lookouts on the Siskiyou National Forest - Cultural Property Inventory and Request for a Determination of Eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places," (USDA, Forest Service PNW Region, Siskiyou National Forest, 26 August 1994), 13-16; Grosvenor, *A History of the Architecture of the USDA Forest Service* (N.P.: United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1999), 95-105.

made of timber or steel and showed some variation in their construction and manufacture. By the early 1950s, however, concerns about costs, quality control, and durability had all led the Forest Service to turn almost exclusively to the use of steel lookouts.[17] The Standard towers ranged between 30 and 83 feet tall and were made from interchangeable parts. Heights were largely determined by the number of stair runs utilized and the depth of the tower's concrete footings. Whether fabricated by Dresser-IDECO or another manufacturer, the Standard Steel Lookout Towers used by the Forest Service, National Park Service, and state lands agencies all followed the same basic specifications.[18] In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the vast majority of the new lookout towers installed in the United States closely resembled the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower. The two lookout towers installed Black Hills National Forest at this time, Warren Peak Lookout Tower and Seth Bullock Lookout Tower, are near replicas of the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower. Both were fabricated by Dresser-IDECO, and both are the same height as the tower in Wind Cave National Park.[19]

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[17] Atwood, "Historic Fire Lookouts on the Siskiyou National Forest," 17.

[18] T. W. Norcross, *Standard Lookout Structure Plans* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1938).

[19] Phone interview with Dennis Mauch, Black Hills National Forest, Bear Lodge Ranger District, 3 September 2010. Personal visit to Seth Bullock Lookout Tower site, 1 September 2010. Both the Warren Peak and the Seth Bullock Lookout Towers are officially listed at 53 feet. The one-foot difference from the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower is likely the result of different sized footings.

Seth Bullock Lookout Tower, Black Hills National Forest (2010)

Warren Peak Lookout Tower, Black Hills National Forest. Source: USFS

Before the lookout tower could be assembled and erected on the newly named Rankin Ridge, it first had to be transported to the site and concrete footings needed to be prepared and poured. These two matters presented the primary challenges. Transporting the tower materials up the steep 150 yards from the landing required the use of Caterpillar tractor to tow them up to the site. Preparing the forms for the concrete footings required the removal of two feet of top soil and four feet of solid rock. The latter task was accomplished by "drilling and blasting." Though difficult chores, these were in no way unique to the transport and assemblage of lookout towers. Most tower sites in the Mountain West, the Far West and the Pacific Northwest are located in far more remote areas in areas with long steep grades. Likewise, they are invariably located in places with little or no top soil. At any rate, the transport to, and preparation of, the Rankin Ridge site was not exceptional or even measurably different from other lookout tower placements in the Black Hills or other parts of the West.

Assembly of the tower was performed by a three-man crew of "day laborers under the supervision of the [Wind Cave National Park] Construction and Maintenance Supervisor, Frank Phillips.… On 30 May the first piece of steel was laid out by Phillips "to begin erection of the tower. Progress of the steel erection took place quite rapidly and fell in good conformity of the approved erection drawings." However, there were two

glitches in the assembly process. As Wind Cave National Park's Student Assistant Engineer Furstenau reported to Phillips, "During the stages of the erection of the second stair run from the bottom, it was discovered that the indicated holes for the railing were misplaced so new ones had to be drilled. At a further stage of the erection, it was discovered that three stair landings were not included in the materials to have been shipped." Dresser-IDECO was notified of the mistake, and new stairs were shipped in early July. In the meantime, "erection of the cab of the tower got under way quite rapidly."[20] The entire project was completed by early September, but the cab was not "completely furnished and equipped until December."[21]

Evaluation and Recommendation

What follows is an evaluation of the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower's historical significance in accordance with the criteria put forward in the *National Register Bulletin*. The conclusion is that the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower does not fulfill these criteria, and is not eligible for listing on the National Register. Instead, it is recommended that Wind Cave National Park have the lookout tower placed on the National Historic Lookout Register (NHLR). Four New Deal era lookout towers in Grand Canyon National Park were recently placed on the this Register, which is "a cooperative effort of the Forest Fire Lookout Association, the National Forestry Association, the National Woodland Owners Association, the U.S. Forest Service, state foresters and Interior agencies."[22] A brief investigation of the various state listings of towers on the NHLR shows that dozens of lookout towers of similar vintage as the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower, and a number were constructed by Dresser-IDECO. Of these, some appear to be exactly the same as the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower while others only differ in the height of the towers.

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[20] Fursteneau, "Narrative report on erection of steel lookout tower and house[,] Rankin Ridge, submitted to Supervisor of Maintenance and Construction, Phillips," in F Ref 1945, Folder 21 "Constr. Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower," WCNP Archives.
[21] "Project History and Construction Report."
[22] Quote is from *National Historic Lookout Register*, 15 September 2010 <http://www.nhlr.org/> (accessed 25 September 2010). Press release on Grand Canyon tower listings at "Four Grand Canyon National Park Lookout Towers have been listed on the National Historic Lookout Register," *Grand Canyon National Park*, 22 July 2009 <http://www.nps.gov/grca/parknews/four-grand-canyon-national-park-lookout-towers-have-been-listed-on-the-national-historic-lookout-register.htm> (accessed 20 September 2010).

Assessment

The National Park Service has developed several criteria for evaluating the significance of a historical property or landmark and its eligibility for inclusion on the National Register. The current version of the *National Register Bulletin* includes the following "Criteria for Evaluation":

> *The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:*
>
> *A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or*
>
> *B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in the past; or*
>
> *C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
>
> *D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.*
>
> *Criteria Considerations*
> *Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:*
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> > *a. A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or*
> >
> > *b. A building or structure removed from its original location but which is primarily significant for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or*
> >
> > *c. A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no appropriate site or building associated with his or her productive life; or*

d. A cemetery that derives its primary importance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or

e. A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or

f. A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own exceptional significance; or

g. A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.[23]

Not all of these criteria are relevant for a historical assessment of the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower in Wind Cave National Park. In particular, the lookout tower is not associated "with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;" nor is it "associated with the lives of significant persons in the past." The ridge on which it is located received its current geographic designation in 1952 and was named after William A. Rankin (1850-1924). Though he was a figure of local note and served as the first Superintendent of Wind Cave National Park, Rankin was not a person of regional or national prominence and the lookout tower has no connection to the life of its indirect namesake.

The Rankin Ridge Fire Tower does not meet a number of other criteria for National Register listings. Neither the locale nor the tower structure, or activities related to its construction and maintenance, have "yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory." The lookout tower and its associated road, parking lot, and nature trail are not "integral parts of districts" of special historical significance. The site is adjacent to South Dakota Highway 87 (SD 87), which is a potential linear corridor historic district. However, as noted in the *Wind Cave National Park Cultural Landscape Report* (May 2005), the period of significance for a designated Historic SD 87 Road Corridor would span from the early 1900s to 1941. The Rankin Ridge Fire Tower, Rankin Ridge Road, the Ranking Ridge Nature Trail, and the parking area were all constructed more than 15 years after this end date.[24]

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[23] *National Register Bulletin: How to Prepare National Historic Landmark Nominations*, 2002 <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_2.htm> (accessed 13 August 2010).

[24] John Milner Associates, Rivanna Archaeological Consulting, and Bahr Vermeer & Haecker Architects, *Wind Cave National Park: Cultural Landscape Report* (Omaha: National Park Service Midwest Region, 2005), 4—37.

The elements of a National Register listing that are most applicable to the Rankin Ridge Fire Tower relate to the age, construction and condition of the structure. The lookout tower is more than 50-years old, it has not been moved, and it has not been substantially modified. In other words, the structure meets the basic threshold for age, and possesses "integrity of location, design, setting, materials, [and] workmanship." While these conditions make the site worthy of consideration for a National Register listing, they do not by themselves determine its eligibility. That ultimately depends on "the significance of [the site's] historic context," as called for in the National Register Bulletin.[25]

Of the four basic criteria for determining the significance of a possible National Register listing, one has been applied for the listing of fire lookout towers: National Register *Criterion A*. As noted above, *Criterion A* relates to a property that "is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history." In applying this criterion to a site, the *National Register Bulletin* further stipulates that a particular "area of significance" needs to be specifically identified; "frequently cited areas of significance are agriculture, community planning and development, social history, commerce, industry, politics and government, education, recreation and culture, and others."[26]

In the case of the recent listing of one prefabricated steel fire lookout tower, Mountain Fire Lookout Tower in the Nicolet National Forest in northern Wisconsin, two "areas of significance" were identified: Conservation and Government. In both instances, the tower's historical significance derived from its rarity within Wisconsin and the region. Its local significance to the history of Conservation in the United States came from its being just one of two surviving lookout towers within the original Nicolet National Forest area, which once included 19 towers. Its local significance to the history of Government stemmed from its being "one of the last remaining structures associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps in the Nicolet National Forest."

Conservation and Government are also potentially relevant categories for determining the historical significance of the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower. Within the context of Conservation, Rankin Ridge is one of many structures that represents a long period in public lands and forest management that emphasized fire suppression. However, this aspect of conservation is not unique within the National Park Service or the Black Hills area, and the history of fire suppression in Wind Cave National Park is not especially noteworthy. More significantly, Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower is not a rarity within the region, which includes 24 lookout towers. Of these, 20 are within the Black Hills National Forest where they are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, three are on state lands where they are managed by State of South Dakota's Resource Conservation & Forestry Division, and one (Rankin Ridge) is within a national park.

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[25] *National Register Bulletin: How to Prepare National Historic Landmark Nominations*, 2002 <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_5.htm> (accessed 13 August 2010).
[26] *Ibid*.

Though some older New Deal era towers have fallen into disrepair, all of the lookout towers in the region possess the same "integrity of location, design, setting, materials, [and] workmanship" that are attributable to the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower. Within the Black Hills National Forest, six of the 20 towers are actively staffed during fire season while several others are used intermittently or in emergencies.[27] Some of the decommissioned or lesser-used lookout towers are remarkable stone and wood structures built in the 1930s and early 1940s by the CCC, including Harney Peak, Cement Ridge, Custer Peak and Mount Coolidge Fire Lookouts. Harney Peak Lookout Tower, along with an adjacent dam, pump house, and stairway, is on the National Register. Nearly all of the rest of the lookout towers in the Black Hills area are prefabricated steel structures with standard 14' x 14' or 7' x 7' cabins. These were all assembled during the late 1950s and early 1960s, like Rankin Ridge, or in the 1930s and 1940s by CCC workers. As noted above, two of the lookout towers in the Black Hills are near duplicates of the Ranking Ridge Lookout Tower. These are the Warren Peak Lookout Tower and the Seth Bullock Lookout Tower, both of which are still actively used for their originally intended purposes.

As it relates to Conservation as an "area of significance," the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower is neither rare nor unusual in the Black Hills or the United States. Its contribution to conservation is no different than other lookout towers of similar or earlier vintage within the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, or other state forest management agencies across the country.

In terms of Government, the period of historical significance for the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower is not easy to determine. Chronologically it fits within the Cold War era, yet the tower does not represent or convey any significant attributes of that historical period. Dresser-IDECO was closely involved in the expansion of United States commerce and power during the Cold War era, especially as it related to increased development and importation of petroleum from overseas. The company was also an important supplier of observation towers for the testing of nuclear explosives.[28] The Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower does not relate to either of these developments, however. The year of its construction does coincide with the first year of Mission 66, the National Park Service's ten-year program to modernize and increase visitor facilities and services by the 50th anniversary of the agency's 1916 establishment. However, the lookout tower was planned, and received funding and authorization, before the Mission 66 program was implemented. Even if it had occurred in conjunction with Mission 66 planning, the

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[27] "Hills' lookouts vital for spotting forest fires," *The Black Hills Pioneer*, 24 August 2010, 1.

[28] Clark, *Chronological History of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Industries*, 110; "Dresser Industries," *The Handbook of Texas Online*, 30 May 2010 <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/dod4.html> (accessed 23 August 2010); Payne, *Initiative in Energy*, 58-68; and "BREN Tower."

lookout tower does not represent or conform to any particular aspects of the modernist style that epitomized the program.[29]

The element of this National Register evaluation that has required the most time and perseverance relates to the effort to determine if the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower is somehow unique. Lookout towers remain fairly ubiquitous throughout the United States, and especially the Mountain West, though most are no longer actively used and many that were built before 1940 have either been replaced or dismantled. From the outset, this evaluation has been predicated on the assumption that the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower might be unique, and thus could meet one important criterion for evaluation listed in the *National Register Bulletin*: namely, that it might "embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or … represent the work of a master, or … possess high artistic values, or … represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction."[30]

Research through the National Historic Lookout Register and readings of several works on lookout towers produced by the U.S. Forest Service and private authors, as well as conversations with staff in the Black Hills National Forest and a site visit to the Seth Bullock Lookout Tower have led to one singular determination.[31] The Rankin Ridge

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[29] On Mission 66 and Mission 66 architecture, see Sarah Allaback, *Mission 66 Visitor Centers:The History of a Building Type* (Washington, D.C.: , 2000); and Ethan Carr, *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

[30] *National Register Bulletin: How to Prepare National Historic Landmark Nominations*, 2002 <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb32/nrb32_appenB.htm> (accessed 13 August 2010).

[31] These works include Gerald W Williams, *An Inventory of the Known Lookout Locations: Southwestern Oregon* ([Roseburg, Or.]: Umpqua National Forest, 1982); Ralph Hartley and James Schneck, *Administering the National Forests of Colorado: An Assessment of the Architectural and Cultural Significance of Historical Administrative Properties* (Golden, CO and Lincoln, NE: U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region and National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, 1996), 15 January 2008 <http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/forest/colorado-nf/index.htm> (accessed 12 September 2010); Ray Kresek, *Fire Lookouts of the Northwest* (Fairfield, WA: Ye Galleon Press, 1984), *passim*; Peter J. Barr, *Hiking North Carolina's Lookout Towers* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 2008), passim; Martin Podskoch and David Hayden, *Adirondack Fire Towers: Their History and Lore: The Southern Districts* (Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 2003), passim; Kay Atwood, *Historic Fire Lookouts on the Siskiyou National Forest* (Grants Pass, OR: Siskiyou National Forest, 1994), passim; Atwood et al, *Utility and Service Combined with Beauty*, *passim;* Zimmermann, *Forest Fire Detection*, 5-8. Grosvenor, *A History of the Architecture of the USDA Forest Service*, 95-105; Thorton, "Fixed Point Fire Detection: The Lookouts," *passim*; Peter L. Steere, *National Forest Fire Lookouts in the Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service* (Washington, DC: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987), *passim*.

Lookout Tower is not unique nor does it "embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or … represent the work of a master, or … possess high artistic values, or … represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction." The prefabricated steel tower is certainly not the work of a master, nor do the tower, access road, parking area and interpretive trail combine to represent the components of a "significant and distinguishable entity.
The Ranking Ridge Lookout Tower is a good example of a type and method of construction: namely, mid-twentieth century industrial prefabrication of interchangeable steel parts. The nature of such construction, by definition, means that the Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower is not stylistically or materially distinct in any meaningful way. Moreover, the tower is just one of countless lookout towers produced in the same manner that are still standing in the Black Hills and across much of the West. Not all of these were manufactured by Dresser-IDECO, though many of the fire lookout towers built for government agencies in the 1950s and early 1960s were produced by Dresser-IDECO or some other manufacturer but not labeled as such. These towers often have manufacturer designations of "USDA Forest Service," "BLM" (Bureau of Land Management), or the National Park Service, though none of these agencies manufactured their own lookout towers.

The Ranking Ridge Lookout Tower is an important feature of Wind Cave National Park, and it will certainly garner recognition on the National Historic Lookout Register. The tower would join five other Black Hills lookout towers on the Register: Custer Peak, Elk Mountain, Harney Peak, and Summit Ridge in South Dakota and Cement Ridge in Wyoming. Rankin Ridge would be the only one on that list dating from the post New Deal era. It would also join a growing list of lookout towers of various eras and styles within national parks like Grand Canyon, Great Smoky, Crater Lake, and Mount Rainier. The Rankin Ridge Lookout Tower is not eligible for listing on the National Register because it does not meet the basic criteria of historical significance.