

[Lookout Cameras Going In at Two Rock Lookout - Redheaded Blackbelt](#)

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The lookout tower at Two Rock

The Ridgewood Fire Safe Council is looking forward to enhanced vigilance when it comes to fires this year – and a large portion of the rest of the county will benefit as well. The Two Rock Lookout, a 30-foot tower on the top of a summit approximately eight miles west of Willits, is about to be called out of retirement.

Two Rock lookout tower was built in 1966, to house a human observer who would scan the view for signs of smoke in the summertime. It was permanently closed in 1994, and in 2020 it was registered as a historical lookout (US 1398, CA 221). On a clear day in February, Laughlin Peak and a few wisps of coastal fog were visible from the tower's tiny kitchen, which is surrounded by a narrow porch at the top of a skinny staircase. It's easy to imagine a human lookout keeping an eye out for fire while preparing a meal and surveying the landscape from the wall of windows surrounding the room.

About five years ago, Eric Hart, who is now the outgoing chair of the Ridgewood Fire Safe Council, started to think that the tower would be the perfect site for fire cameras. On one perfect day for taking in the view, he climbed to the top of the tower with a visitor and scanned the horizon.

"I don't know that I have the words to describe what we're looking at," Hart said, as fog blurred the edges of the distant mountains. "It's gorgeous up here; it's a 360-degree view. It reaches way past Willits Valley to the east, and you can see all the way to the coast to the west. You can see clearly right now up into Brooktrails. I can see Anthony Peak from here. To the south, we've got Williams Peak, and two ridges past that is Orr

Springs. Comptche is about four or five ridges that way. It was put here for this reason – because you can see everything from here.”

Two Rock is a perfect location for modern wildfire early-detection cameras, and the Ridgewood Fire Safe Council has been working for several years to make that happen. The two cameras that will be installed there this summer will fill significant current blind spots, and cover a substantial portion of the county.

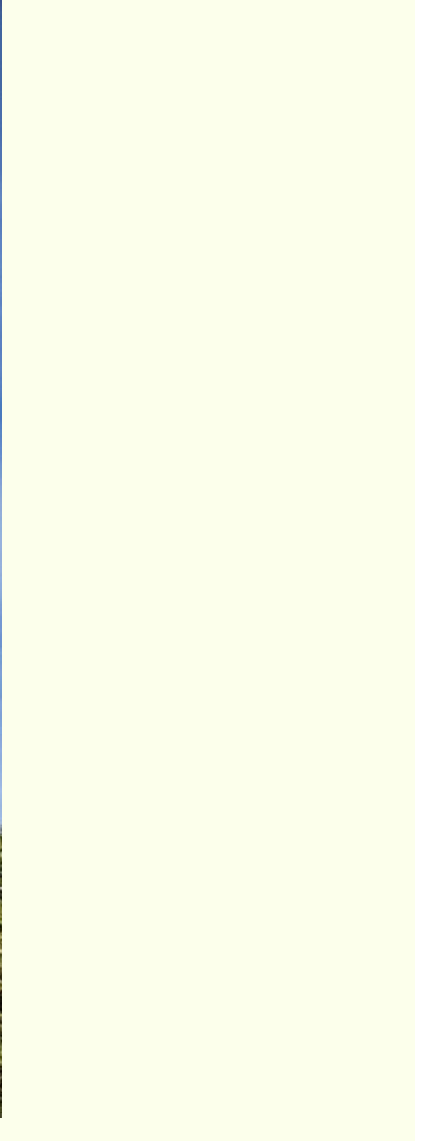
The cameras will require a significant amount of infrastructure, most notably solar-powered internet. Hart reports that shortly after talks about installing cameras began in 2021, the property owner, Rich Padula, passed away. The site now belongs to the timber company Green Diamond, and Hart says the company has been supportive of fire-resiliency efforts, including allowing the neighborhood Fire Safe Council to maintain an evacuation route on their property that winds through the woods to Highway 20. That route requires diligent maintenance: on the way out to the tower, Hart had to break out the chainsaw three times to remove trees that had fallen across the unpaved road during winter storms.

In the interval before Green Diamond purchased the property, an opportunity to fund the cameras with a grant from PG&E almost slipped away. “It’s \$65,000 for the first year, to install and maintain it, and then \$25,000 a year after that to maintain it and keep the internet going,” Hart divulged. “So it was a significant chunk of change - we could not have raised that on our own.”

But, he added, after missing a few grant cycles, “right at the end of 2025, Green Diamond offered to pay \$30,000 to get the project going.” That was enough to convince PG&E to chip in for the rest - “so we squeaked in right under the bell in getting it approved.” PG&E will also cover the annual operating costs of the system, which will be part of the company’s camera program.

Digital Path, a Chico-based engineering company, plans to have the equipment installed in time for the main fire season this year. The images from the cameras will be monitored by an AI system, and CAL FIRE’s Howard Forest dispatch center will be notified of any sign of fire.

“It was a four-year path that at times didn’t seem like it was actually going to happen,” Hart reflected. “It was at the top of the list of things I wanted to do for those four years, and we finally got it through at the last minute.”





Eric Hart on the lookout tower pointing toward Laughlin Peak



The view



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