NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8/86)
NPS/WHS Word Processor Format
(Approved 03/88)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16).

Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries. Use letter quality printers in 12 pitch. Use only 25% or greater cotton content bond paper.

1. Name of Property

historic name Crane Flat Fire Lookout
other names/site number Building 6202

2. Location

street & number off Big Oak Flat Road
city, town Yosemite National Park __ **vicinity**

state California **code** CA **county** Mariposa **code** 043 **zip code**

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within Property	
		contributing	noncontributing
__ private	x building(s)	1	__ buildings
__ public-local	__ district	__	__ sites
__ public-State	__ site	__	__ structures
x public-Federal	__ structure	__	__ objects
	__ object	1	__ Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks

No. of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this xx nomination _ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria.

_See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official — Date: 3/6/96

National Park Service

State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property X meets _ does not meet the National Register criteria.
_ See continuation sheet.

Daniel Abeyta for Cherilyn Widell — Date: 2/9/96

Signature of commenting or other official

State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register
_ See continuation sheet — Signature: Paul R. Lusignan — Date: 4/4/96

_ determined eligible for the National Register. _ See continuation sheet

_ determined not eligible for the National Register.

_ removed from the National Register

_ other, (explain:) _____

for Signature of the Keeper — Date

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
GOVERNMENT/fire station	GOVERNMENT/fire station
	WORK IN PROGRESS/restoration

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER/Rustic

Materials
(enter categories from instructions)

foundations Stone
walls Wood
roof Shingle
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Crane Flat fire lookout is a Rustic style, two-story frame structure set atop a knoll near Crane Flat in Yosemite National Park at an elevation of 6600'. Its location affords a panoramic view of the Rockefeller tract. The lookout is accessed via a paved road which takes off from the Big Oak Flat Road west of the intersection with the Tioga Pass Road. A trail leads from the parking lot near the top of the access road to the lookout, which is set in a clearing which is now largely covered with asphalt and used as a heliport. There is a stone retaining wall at one edge of the heliport, but it is not known when it was built. The trail is of recent vintage, built to allow visitors safe access to the fire lookout and keep them from interfering with the official traffic that needs access to the site at all times.

The Crane Flat fire lookout was built in 1931. It is square in plan, with the first floor slightly larger all around than the second floor; the sides are slightly battered. The first story measures eighteen feet square. Originally intended for use as a garage, it is now used to store equipment and supplies. Barn-like double doors on the north side provide access to the storage space. The original doors with 4-lights over panels with cross-bracing remain in place, but they have been covered with plywood. The masonry foundation is granite and rises about four feet above grade. Above the masonry, the structure is covered with a combination of lap and shake siding, painted brown. The 1x12 lap siding is at the corners, and shingles, laid in an alternating pattern, fill in the center of the east, south and west sides. There is a 2-light fixed wood sash window on the south side. A staircase on the west side leads up to a second floor catwalk which surrounds the building. Stone steps lead up to the height of the foundation where the stairway turns 90 degrees and is built alongside the building with wood steps and a wood railing. At the top of the steps the landing abuts the catwalk and is supported by two cantilevered beams with chamfered ends characteristic of the Rustic style.

The second story, the observatory, measures fourteen feet square. With the exception of a single door, it has operable wood casement windows all around to allow for panoramic viewing. The door, however, also has a large pane of glass so as not to obstruct the view. The walls are mostly windows, with 1x12 lap siding below the window sills. The windows and window hardware are all original. Inside are some desks, chairs, the original cast iron stove, and, in the center, the original fire finder. The fire finder sits on a square podium and is used to determine the location of the fire by aligning the smoke with the finder and a correlated topographic map.

The building has an overhanging hipped roof covered with wood shingles, an integral wood rain gutter which is badly deteriorated, and a metal chimney.

A one-story plywood shed addition to the east was constructed in 1977. It sits on a concrete slab footing and is of flimsy construction. It has a metal roof and aluminum sash. The addition contains kitchen facilities for the fire crew. An open lean-to is built against the south side of the addition and is used for tool and rescue equipment storage. These minor changes do not hide original features of the building or impact the ability of the structure to convey the significance of its use and design.

There is a concrete walkway around much of the building. Picnic tables are set up right outside the addition. A modern outhouse is located nearby.

__ See continuation sheet.

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The knoll on which the lookout sits site was cleared of dense vegetation at the time of the lookout's construction in order to improve visibility. Much of the cleared area is now covered with asphalt and serves as the landing pad for the helicopters and helitack crews based at the lookout during the fire season. The area is still kept clear of vegetation, though to a lesser extent today because less open space is required with the present use.

The Crane Flat fire lookout, though unusual in having a garage on the ground story, was nonetheless typical of fire lookout design in the 1930s, particularly in its utilization of a glass wall, cat walk and overhanging roof. The addition and lean-to are scheduled to be removed and the lookout is scheduled for complete restoration, much as was recently done with the Henness Ridge fire lookout. Once this work is completed, the Crane Flat lookout will have regained all its structural integrity.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
__ nationally __ statewide x locally

Applicable National Register Criteria x A __ B X C __ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) __ A __ B __ C __ D __ E __ F __ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Conservation	1931	1931
Architecture		

Cultural Affiliation
n/a

Significant Person(s)

Architect/Builder
National Park Service Landscape Division
Wosky, John, landscape architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Crane Flat Fire Lookout is locally significant in the areas of conservation and architecture because it illustrates the development of fire policy within federal land management agencies and was the first fire lookout built by the National Park Service in Yosemite National Park. In addition, the structure is an early application of the tenets of Rustic architecture being espoused at the time for the development of park and recreation facilities.

Conservation and Fire Management in Yosemite National Park

Until the 1920s the National Park Service had no central fire control organization. Fire control expertise came primarily from park rangers who had graduated from forestry school or who had transferred from the Forest Service and who still adhered to Forest Service philosophy about the spread of fire and control techniques. Many early parks, formed out of national forests, inherited the remains of the previous Forest Service fire organizations, such as lookout towers, roads, and trails.

The Park Service considered fire a threat to the scenic and recreational values of the parks, as had the earlier Yosemite state commissioners and, with some notable exceptions, the U.S. Army. The Park Service's major fire control policy was suppression, although no money specifically for that purpose had ever been appropriated. In 1922 the Park Service finally received a special fire control appropriation — an emergency account to be used only in case of fire. Four years later that account was combined with other moneys into a general disaster fund to cope with emergencies and repair damage they created. No pre-suppression activities were allowed, however.

In 1926, while the forest fire danger continued to grow, Chief Naturalist Ansel Hall became head of a Park Service Division of Education and Forestry, headquartered in Berkeley, California. The position primarily was to be concerned with interpreting forest resources to visitors, but it soon included fire planning duties. In 1928 the actions of Park Service crews in fighting a large fire near Sequoia National Park brought much criticism and led to the creation of the post of Fire Control Expert, under the Chief Forester. A veteran Forest Service supervisor, John D. Coffman, was named to the new post. Under Coffman, the Park Service and other members of the Forest Protection Board prepared a comprehensive fire prevention plan detailing the facilities and other requirements necessary for fire control within the National Park system. This work laid the foundation for later Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) fire programs in the parks. Congress then made its first national appropriation of $10,000 for park fire protection and also stressed the need for pre-suppression capabilities, like brush clearing and other activities carried out by the CCC.

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The Crane Flat fire lookout, the first of its kind in Yosemite National Park, was completed in 1931 and was the result of the fire protection plan Coffman developed for Yosemite. The Park Service's Landscape Division prepared the plans for the structure, and John Wosky, landscape architect, planned the site. The first story functioned as a garage and the second was used for observation activities. The structure overlooked recently acquired lands purchased with $1.7 million donated by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and matched by congressional funds.

The Civilian Conservation Corps also played a significant role in fire protection. Emergency Conservation Work (later CCC) projects in the national parks and forests included construction and maintenance of fire breaks, construction of fire-related structures, and forest fire suppression. Prior to the ECW, forest fires had posed the gravest threat to the parks, but the Park Service had always lacked sufficient fire fighting personnel and had been unable to implement fire protection programs in each park. Civilian Conservation Corps crew members managed to reduce park fire losses dramatically beginning in the first nine months of 1933. The men not only located and suppressed fires, but they also constructed fire towers and telephone lines as well as roads, trails and other types of firebreaks. The following year, refinements were made to park fire-fighting programs and specific CCC enrollees were selected for fire protection training. In general, ECW enrollees enabled parks to begin implementing fire protection plans.

The construction of a fire lookout at Henness Ridge in 1934 was another step in the implementation of the fire protection program for Yosemite National Park developed with Coffman's assistance. The Henness Ridge fire lookout is a three-story structure built by local workers under the supervision and direction of the Yosemite engineering department. One other early fire suppression unit still exists in Yosemite National Park. It is a single-story structure which was constructed as a guard station in 1934. It stands at Miguel Meadow and is now used as a patrol cabin.

Today the park service philosophy towards fire is slightly different. Beginning in the 1960s, as a result of an increasing awareness of the role fire plays in the health of an ecosystem, the program moved from one of aggressive suppression and fire control to one of fire management and the use of fire as a resource management tool. This change began upon seeing changes in the ecosystems of national parks like Everglades, Sequoia and Yosemite which had adhered to a strict policy of fire suppression and were losing the very resources they were created to protect. The giant Sequoia trees, for example, need fire in order to regenerate.

Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks were where this policy change was first implemented. The need for forest ecosystem management and, particularly in Yosemite, meadow management, along with greater knowledge of the benefits of fire, fostered the change.

Current NPS Management Policies state:

> Park fire management programs will be designed around resource management objective and the various management zones of the park. Fire is an integral component of natural resource management. It may be used to restore or maintain natural ecosystems; influence naturally successional patterns; restore or maintain an historic scene; restore or maintain vistas; reduce fuels which contribute to a wildfire hazard; create

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fuelbreaks near developments or park boundaries; enhance the habitat of sensitive species, control exotic species.[1]

Interestingly, the change in fire management and the change in technology may have created a greater need for the fire look out. At first, it seemed that air surveillance would replace staffed fire lookouts. However, helicopter overflights only give park officials a brief chance to determine if a fire has started. Staffed fire lookouts allow continual observation, often enabling faster fire detection and therefore a faster response. When fire danger is high, parks that have them have been staffing up their fire lookouts, often putting these structures back in service after an extended period of abandonment.

The Crane Flat fire lookout is still used as a fire lookout as well as a base for the helitack crews which conduct both fire fighting and search and rescue operations because of its strategic location. It is fully staffed during fire season, from May to mid-November. In addition, it is open to park visitors and offers them a chance to learn about fire ecology and the history of fire management.

Rustic Architecture in the Parks

The Crane Flat fire lookout is also significant for its architecture. Built of native stone and wood, it typifies, and has been singled out as an excellent example of, the Rustic style developed by the National Park Service as part of intensive planning and construction efforts in the parks from 1916 to 1942. It is one of only four Rustic style fire lookouts in the state, according to Mark Thornton, an authority on fire lookouts in California. All four are within national park areas. Three of the lookouts, the two in Yosemite, Crane Flat and Henness Ridge, and the one in Lassen Volcanic National Park, on Mount Harkness, date from the 1930s; the other one, on Sconchin Butte in Lava Beds National Monument, was constructed in 1940. All stand in stark contrast to U.S. Forest Service lookouts which are primarily metal and strictly functional in nature.

In the late 1920's the protection of park forests was becoming an increasingly important activity within the national parks. The Forestry Division headed by John Coffman began to develop detailed surveys of fire hazards in a number of parks as well as comprehensive plans for the prevention and suppression of forest fires in those areas. As with interpretation, another new activity of the National Park Service, forest fire management required structures and facilities. In 1929, the NPS Landscape Division collaborated with Coffman to develop standard designs and specifications for fire lookout towers. These standard designs "used stone and timber materials fashioned into functional designs that included a large viewing platform entirely surrounded and enclosed by large windows and surrounded by an outside balcony."[2] Apparently, the fire lookout posed a design problem for designers: in order to perform their essential function, they needed to be located on prominent peaks, provide 360-degree visibility, and not have the view obscured by vegetation. The solution — use of native stone and timber and a simple, rectangular form with hipped roof — enabled these lookouts to blend with their setting. Fire lookouts were used not only to help detect fires in remote areas but were also used by visitors to enjoy the view from up high. These standard designs were used in many parks, tailored to each particular location by the use of local materials.

There were "several types of structures (which) have been designed for efficient fire protection, including a simple single-room building 14 by 14 feet which combines living quarters and observatory, a two-story building with observatory above

[1]National Park Service, NPS-77 Natural Resources Management Guideline, (Washington, D.C., 1991), 212-213.

[2]Linda Flint McClelland, Presenting Nature: The Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service 1916 to 1942, (Washington, D.C., 1993), 148.

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and storage space below, a low tower with 14 by 14 feet observatory on top, and finally the higher steel towers, some of which are 65 feet high with smaller enclosures."[3] The Crane Flat fire lookout is one of the two-story types.

In 1932, Thomas C. Vint, the Park Service's Chief Landscape Architect, assembled a portfolio of representative park buildings and structures that was circulated among various parks to serve as examples for their own construction projects. According to Linda McClelland's study, "this document indicates what Vint considered the most successful and representative designs that (e)merged from his office from 1927-1932."[4] The Crane Flat fire lookout in Yosemite National Park was one of the structures included in that portfolio.

Park and Recreation Structures, published in 1938, defined the philosophy of design in the National Park Service as it pertained to various categories of structures. The guidelines for fire lookouts summarize both the design philosophy and the fire control policy of the National Park Service in the 1930s.

> The prompt detection of any forest fire that may start is a basic necessity for the efficient protection of forested parks. In order to provide for early discovery and immediate report of size, location, and condition of fires before they become large, it is necessary that trained observers be so stationed that they can keep the forest under constant observations. These stations are usually located on heights which overlook the greatest possible expanse of danger area, and particularly which cover the most probable points of fire origin.
>
> Since lookouts are located on vantage points selected for their broad coverage of forest, they are also the best points from which the public can view the finest scenic panoramas. A well-designed structure and a properly trained lookout observer can contribute to the enjoyment of the park by the public, and the observer is offered a chance to sell fire protection painlessly to the visitors.[5]

The Crane Flat fire lookout is significant because it perfectly illustrates the conservation and architectural themes of the National Park Service in the 1930s. It has continued to be used as a fire lookout since being built, and although technologies have changed, the building's functions are essentially the same. Once restored, the building will once again posses integrity of design in addition to the integrity of location, materials, setting, feel and association which it never lost.

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[3]Albert H. Good, ed., Park and Recreation Structures, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1938), 155.

[4]Linda Flint McClelland, Presenting Nature: the Historic Landscape Design of the National Park Service 1916-1942, (Washington, D.C., 1993), 145.

[5]Ibid.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

x See continuation sheet

__preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
__previously listed in the National Register
__previously determined eligible by the National Register
__designated a National Historic Landmark
__recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
__recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:
__State Historic Preservation Office
__Other State agency
x Federal agency
__Local government
__University
__Other
Specify Repository:
Yosemite National Park; NPS Pacific Great Basin SSO
_____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A	1/1 Zone	2/5/1/5/1/9 Easting	4/1/8/2/9/1/0 Northing	B	/ Zone	///// Easting	////// Northing
C	/ Zone	///// Easting	////// Northing	D	/ Zone	///// Easting	////// Northing

__ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

x See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

x See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jamie M. Donahoe, Historian date November 8, 1995

organization National Park Service

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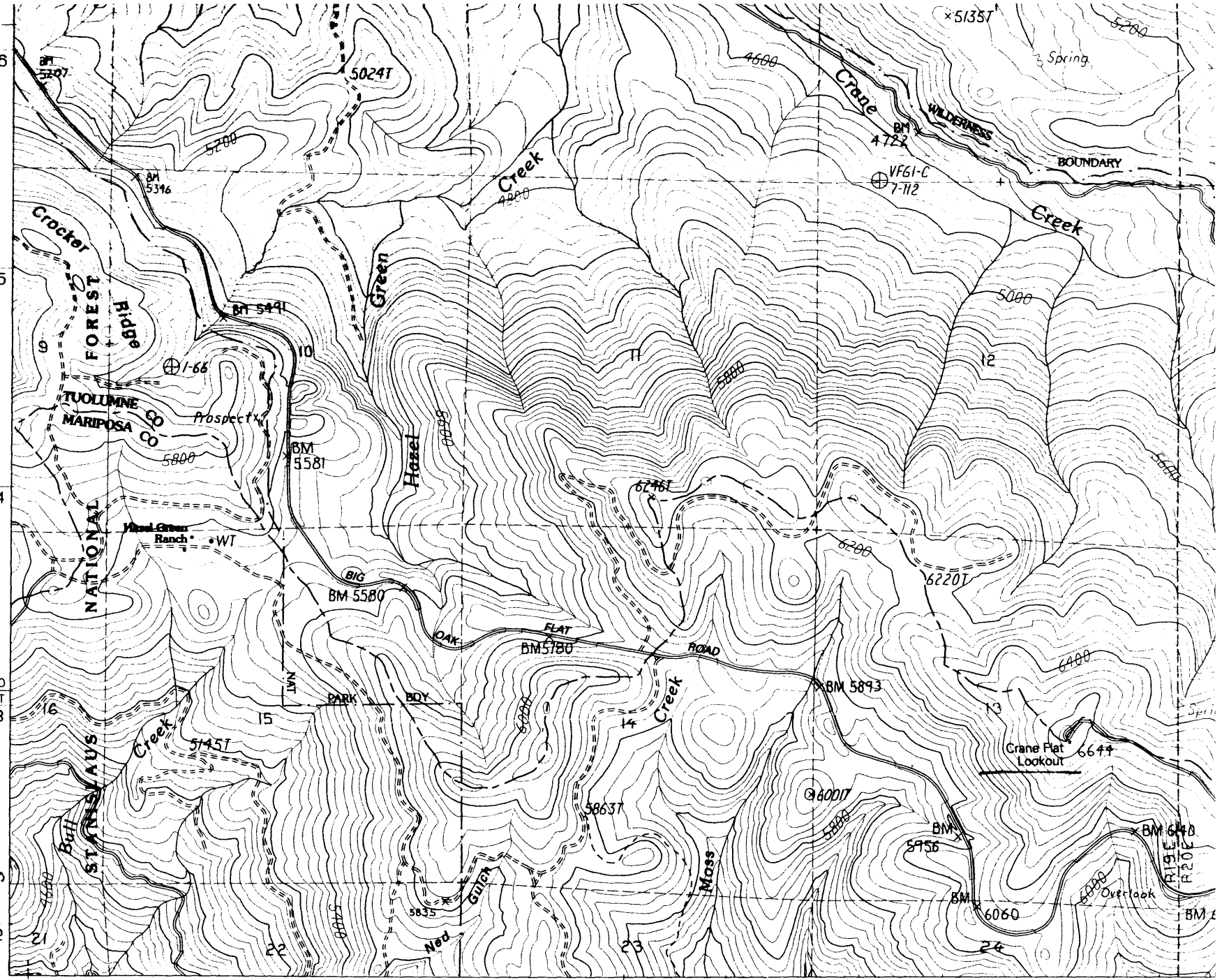
Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary includes the Crane Flat fire lookout and the cleared area upon which it sits. The lookout itself, however, is the only contributing resource.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the Crane Flat fire lookout and the area which was modified during its construction and continues to be kept clear of encroaching vegetation to allow for smooth operation of the helitack facility. The lookout is the only significant resource with integrity at the site.



CRANE FLAT FIRE LOOKOUT, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK
UTM REFERENCE:
11 [illegible]

CA

PRODUCED BY THE UNITED STATES GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

CONTROL BY	USGS, NOS/NOAA
COMPILED FROM IMAGERY TAKEN	1984 AND 1985
PHOTOINSPECTED USING IMAGERY DATED	1992
NO MAJOR CULTURE OR DRAINAGE CHANGES OBSERVED	
PLSS AND SURVEY CONTROL CURRENT AS OF	1987
BOUNDARIES AND NAMES VERIFIED	1994

NORTH

SCALE 1:

1 .5 0 KILOMETE
1000 0 METE
.5