CAPSULE SUMMARY
Powellville Forest Fire Tower
Mt Pleasant Road
Willards vicinity, Maryland
Constructed 1943
Public- within DNR’s Department of Natural Resources, Forest Service property

The Powellville Forest Fire Tower stands in an isolated forested location in eastern Wicomico County, fourteen miles east of Salisbury, MD. Approaching the site from US Route 50 eastbound from Salisbury, one turns south at Willards, MD, onto the two lane paved Powellville Road (MD Route 354). The site is approximately three miles south of US Route 50. At Mount Pleasant Road, one turns east onto the 1.5 lane paved Mt. Pleasant Road for .2 miles. The 2.88 acre tower parcel is situated approximately 55 feet south of Mt Pleasant Road. It is accessible via an overgrown unimproved entrance lane. The tower is surrounded by natural areas- approximately one mile west of the tower is the Wicomico Demonstration State Forest and two miles east is the Pocomoke River and its surrounding wetlands. The community of Powellville, with a population of 100, is located two miles south of the tower.

The tower is associated with the statewide construction of forty-two towers to reduce fire danger, during the period 1915-1960s. Its steel structure is 140 feet in height, and is the tallest tower in Maryland. One source identified the tower as the tallest east of the Mississippi River, which information cannot be substantiated. (As “highest east of Mississippi River-” Maryland’s DNR website only). The tower was financed by the US Navy, and was initially used for both fire detection and as an aircraft and watercraft warning service site, in order to deter the enemy, during World War II. The stilt-like, four legged tower is topped by an open wooden cab, which is reached by a trap door, accessible to the towermen and towerwomen by a stairway of 120-145 steps. It was not constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and is in deteriorated condition. The lowest run of stairs has been removed, due to problems with trespassing, vandalism and graffiti. The original c. 1943 towerman’s office, once located approximately eight feet east of the tower, was demolished 2004.

The Powellville Forest Fire Tower does not appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The tower does embody a statewide initiative to fight forest fires, and has associations with the US Navy and World War II. It is the tallest in Maryland, but it is not unique in its construction, and no people of significance are associated with the site.