

Gladding fire shows our vulnerability

The Gladding fire left heartbreaking destruction in its wake Sept. 1.

I witnessed much of the damage traveling with emergency officials along the fire's perimeter that evening. It was devastating, seeing homes and barns I recognized in flames, watching wind-driven embers starting new fires time and time again, and glimpsing dazed neighbors I have known for many years walking along roads near their homes.

I have lived most of my life in rural Lincoln, and I had never seen anything like the Gladding fire.

I want to say thanks to the many firefighters and other emergency workers who did a magnificent job battling the blaze and protected the public that day. Their skill and dedication kept the fire from becoming a much-bigger tragedy.

I was amazed at how quickly aircraft and helicopters were overhead helping battle the blaze, and how soon fire crews from distant communities were on scene to aid the effort.

The Gladding fire demonstrated that we need to redouble our efforts to protect our residences from wildfires. We need to take another look at whether we have provided enough defensible space around our properties and taken other steps that can help protect them from wildfires.

We need to consider how changing land-use patterns affect how vulnerable rural Lincoln is to large wildfires. Today, for example, we have far fewer irrigated pastures to act as firebreaks and many more rural residences at risk than in the past.

The Gladding fire showed the strength of the ties that bind us together as a community. Neighbors helped each other evacuate. Volunteers helped Placer County Animal Services make sure animals got to safety. The entire community pitched in to help the victims.

The fire was a disaster none of us will forget. From it, though, we emerged with a renewed sense of community, and that is one of our greatest strengths.

Placer County Supervisor Robert M. Weygandt