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PREVENTION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 18

rebuilding—exacerbates conditions, he said.

In 1998, as a wildland fire planner at Chico State after working for the U.S. Forest Service, Lunder prepared a report that laid out conditions for a catastrophic fire in Paradise. The town comprised thousands of independent landowners: many wishing privacy, most with distinct lot layouts and with differing desires and abilities to clear brush.

"If you wanted to clear the creeks in Paradise, you [may] have to cross 10 different properties in 500 feet," Lunder said by phone. "And you can't even get in there with a chipper or a big brush-cutting mower."

Even those who thinned fuels lost homes in the Camp Fire, he noted.

"If your neighbor's house catches on fire and is less than 50 feet away, yours is going to burn down, too, because of the heat," Lunder said. "And, so, if people go back and build all these houses on these tight lots, it doesn't really matter what we do with the vegetation if there's a wind-driven fire and embers everywhere."

Lunder compares the situation to century-old cities trying to adapt to modern transportation. It's tough to put bike paths and bus lanes into municipalities not built for them. Same for cities now at fire risk.

"Insurance companies are the only institution ... willing to say, 'No,' to continued development or settlement of the high fire hazard areas," he said. "We should be talking about a managed retreat from the most flammable places, and making plans how we can redesign them after they inevitably burn. We'd be way ahead of the game if we'd have made a plan to redesign a post-fire Paradise 20 years ago—we knew it would eventually burn, just as we know Marin, Cohasset and Placerville will now."

Impacts go beyond the fire itself. As Cal Fire warns in its recent daily update: "Although wildfire damage can be immeasurable, the danger is not over after the flames are put out. Flash flooding and debris flows, structural damage, road instability and damaged trees are just some of the dangers that exist after a wildfire." Butte County residents, particularly in Butte Creek Canyon, know these aftereffects too well.

Hankins told the CN&R he's working



Pyrogeographer Zeke Lunder, a wildfire analyst and mapper for Deer Creek Resources, sees ongoing risks for residents in wildland-urban interfaces.

CN&R FILE PHOTO

on a statewide initiative for a comprehensive approach to fire prevention; the effort is so new, it doesn't have a formal name or standing. It involves other fire experts, including indigenous practitioners of prescribed burning.

Rougle's agency, the Resource Conservation District, continues to work with agencies such as the Butte County Fire Safe Council on projects like safeguarding evacuation routes and forest health. Since the federal government controls less than 40 percent of county land, aligning what she calls "such a patchwork" of owners remains a challenge.

"We can't reverse climate change in a gubernatorial administration or several human generations probably," Rougle said. "We can make

decisions that leave future generations with less of a problem. If we dedicated the funds and the political will and the social license, we actually could reverse generations of bad forest management in a couple of gubernatorial administrations. It just takes getting people out in the woods [to see for themselves]."

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—Pyrogeographer Zeke Lunder