

Scotts Valley fire destroys farm outbuilding Tuesday

Contributed by Harold LaBonte
Wednesday, 01 July 2009
Last Updated Thursday, 02 July 2009

LAKEPORT – On Tuesday afternoon Doug Patten was returning to his 21-acre farm at 3489 Scotts Valley Road from the funeral service of a longtime neighbor.

As he rounded the last corner before the long straightaway he noticed a column of smoke off in the distance.

Patten is very familiar with the area and quickly realized that the smoke may be originating from the area surrounding his home.

His fears were substantiated as he pulled onto the long gravel approach driveway from Scott's Valley Road.

A former Pacific Gas & Electric employee who now grows hay on his property, Patten told Lake County News that he had been burning to clear some acreage with a permitted control burn in preparation for his next crop.

A metal skinned outbuilding near the area where his thought-to-be extinguished farm burn was engulfed in flames.

Fortunately for Patten and at least a half dozen surrounding homeowners, a fellow neighbor, Scott Lock, noticed the flames just minutes before.

Lock, using a feature on his cell phone, was able to report that he made the original 911 call at 4:22 p.m.

Emergency personnel from Lakeport Fire – including Chief Ken Wells – were on scene within minutes and were quickly able to assess the situation calling for more equipment and personnel including an alert to Cal Fire.

On scene evidence indicated that Patten had followed requirements regarding agricultural burning. Several commercial grade hoses were located surrounding the planned burn area.

Patten indicated that he left the property to attend the funeral of his neighbor only after the controlled burn was extinguished. Wells said Patten reported dousing that fire area with water.

Hot but mild breezes added to the threat. Several residents on scene indicated that at least six other homes in the area were threatened.

A home located 300 yards west of the destroyed structure was at one point 30-percent surrounded by burning grass.

The quick work of fire personnel saved this home and prevented damage to any other structures.

At the peak of the battle at least three dozen ground personnel, one Cal Fire helicopter and three air tankers were engaged. Wheeled vehicles from Cal Fire, US Department of Forestry, Lakeport and Kelseyville fire stations 50 and 55 and their personnel battled through heavy smoke both from the ground and the air.

Other than the loss of the outbuilding and damage to several hundred feet of split rail fencing, perhaps the greatest loss was the 1962 Jeep that was parked in the only structure destroyed.

The well-coordinated efforts of all involved, including Patten, helped prevent further damage to land or possessions.

E-mail Harold LaBonte at hlabonte@lakeconews.com .