

Dear Board of Supervisors,

I have lived in High Valley since the early 1980s; my family has been here since the 1940s. Please read this as a life-safety letter. In High Valley, one decision—on a road with one way in and one way out—can decide whether families, seniors, and animals get out in time.

Why one road is different.

High Valley is a single-egress bowl with steep grades and no shoulders. In fast-moving fire or flood, heavy equipment is coming in at the same time families are trying to get out. On High Valley Road there is nowhere to pull off, no safe passing for low-boys or semis hauling dozers, and sightlines are limited. That geometry turns minutes into the difference between safe and trapped.

When the power goes, the valley goes quiet.

When power is out, most of us lose water (no pumps) and practical phone service (our phones rely on home internet/Wi-Fi). That means evacuation alerts and road-closure updates may not reach us at all—exactly when seconds matter.

What this means for safety in real life.

Evacuation here isn't just "leave early." It's kids who cross High Valley Road for school, elders and people recovering from surgery who can't move fast, and large animals that can't be hauled out in one trip. Safety here means redundant ways out or true passing space, responder ingress planned against resident egress, and backup water/communication that still works during shutoffs.

1996 Forks Fire.

Cal Fire camped in our fields. My dad worked that fire and called one evening to tell me the decision had been made to force the fire down into the valley to put it out before it hit town. I had a lot of livestock, and panic set in because the road had already been closed so more fire engines and dozers could come in. After speaking with Cal Fire, they and my family dozed a large area in our field and told us to put all the animals and important things inside the dozed area so they could try to save it since there was no option to leave. We immediately set up corrals for the horses, gathered all the animals, and moved them into that space. It had been raining ash for days. It was very windy, the winds were erratic, and the fire was being driven our way. As I was grabbing the last of my important things to head to the dozed area, the phone rang—my dad again—saying the wind direction had changed and the decision was now to let it burn toward Long Valley. Scary as it was, we were going to be okay.

Severe flooding .

In one prolonged storm, rain just kept dumping for days. High Valley Road sits on the valley floor and often floods in winter, but this was worse than usual. We missed work and were stuck in the valley for several days. One evening two helicopters flew in and landed. Sheriff's deputies knocked on doors and told us to leave with them by helicopter because more rain was coming and they didn't know how bad the valley would flood. I chose to stay and prepared my animals to move them to high ground if needed; I couldn't face leaving them.

2018 Mendocino Complex (River Fire and Ranch Fire).

I was at work in the Riviera that morning and had to evacuate because of the River Fire. I decided to go early to my second job in Nice. Driving through Lakeport I saw the smoke from the Ranch Fire. I was only at work about two hours before the power went out. Both fires were growing rapidly. My boss sent us home. I remember that drive and the panic on people's faces as they were getting supplies while the power was going out everywhere. I called my family and asked where they were; they were all heading home.

I was also working for PSI World and caring for their seven horses. Those were sleepless nights of worry as the fire was burning in our direction. I listened to the Cal Fire daily reports to the public at the Moose Lodge. With no power there is no running water unless you have a generator—and most of our cell phones do not work in the valley when the power is out because they usually rely on internet/Wi-Fi to connect—so you can be completely cut off from alerts and updates. One afternoon the sheriff came around and issued an evacuation warning for the valley. I started making phone calls to get the PSI World horses and my animals out and to safety. A rescue group arrived and rescued four horses on the first trip, then came back and rescued three more. After that they tried to return again to rescue my horses and other animals, but the road had been closed—they could not get back into the valley.

I wrote my phone number on my horses' hooves because the only choices left were to try to lead them out or let them loose. We dozed an area again and put our RV—with my parrots, cats, and dogs—inside it to protect them and the horses in a portable corral. Northshore Fire arrived and went house to house to give residents the plan. Here came the fire down into the valley. We were stuck and could only prepare for the worst. I watched as part of my family's homestead burn, and my cousin's house get bombed with fire retardant. My neighbor came with a dozer and a water truck and fought like hell to save my place. Thankfully, my house was saved. We all survived, and so did our houses—but it went from a warning to “you can't leave” very fast. With only one way in and out, that's a very dangerous

situation—especially with so many people living on Cerrito, Alta Vista, and High Valley. You have to remember that fire personnel and dozers are trying to come up High Valley Road at the same time residents are trying to leave. The road is not very wide, and there's nowhere to go if you meet a semi.

Most recent Glenhaven Fire.

I was home alone after surgery and completely unaware of the fire until a friend called me. I turned on the scanner and called my family; they were trying to get home. The power went out. I hadn't received any Watch Duty or other alerts, and most cell phones don't work up here without internet when the power is down, so you can be in the dark about what's happening. Across the scanner I heard a sheriff yelling, "Leave the area." I glanced out the window and saw a patrol car leaving the valley. The officer reported to dispatch that the valley was clear and there were no remaining residents. That wasn't true—they never came to my house. A neighbor said the patrol car drove through the valley with a loudspeaker but didn't go to anyone's door. Most of the residents live far off the road and would not hear a sheriff on a loud speaker. My son just made it home before the road was closed. We found ourselves trapped—again. Thankfully, we made it through another fire.

At Horseshoe Bend, a single stuck truck or low-boy can seal the valley. With only one way in and one way out, a blockage there means residents can't evacuate and fire, medical, or law-enforcement crews can't reach us. In red-flag conditions, minutes matter—this choke point turns an incident into a life-safety emergency until the vehicle is cleared.

Even your own bodies have recognized the risk on this road: Timestamps of Poverty Flats hearing 05/22/2025

- Commissioner Field (≈6:09:02–6:09:47): "Clearly we have a huge problem here with the roads... Can we halt development until the roads are ready?"

- Commissioner Rosenthal (≈6:11:02): "I would love to see County Public Works here... I can't continue to approve these projects until we have some answers to that."

- Chair Chavez (≈6:13:44–6:15:02): "It's already happening. It's already an issue... there will be an increase in traffic."

- Chair Chavez (≈6:15:21–6:15:34): "How do we approve a project when we know that there's issues on the road?"

- Commissioner Fields (≈6:32:27–6:33:00): "This is one of the most difficult decisions I've faced... this is the last time. We need to address the road issue as a county."

- Commissioner Fields (≈6:33:46–6:34:00): "When a child gets hit, how am I going to feel?"

Bottom-line safety standard: Please do not place or expand high-intensity operations in a single-egress valley like High Valley.

Please consider the areas where you are putting these operations and ensure that safety comes first.