

Watch the [version broadcast on CBS 5 on Saturday here](#).

--

<https://news.yahoo.com/lake-county-luxury-hotel-housing-073300736.html>



# Lake County Luxury Hotel, Housing Project Raises Concerns Over Wildfire Risk

Sat, March 6, 2021, 2:33 AM

California's attorney general wants to put a stop to a luxury housing development in a fire-prone area of Lake County. Susie Steimle reports. (3-5-21)

## Video Transcript

**KEN BASTIDA:** Our original series, "Project Home." State attorney general is fighting to stop a massive luxury development in the North Bay.

**JULIETTE GOODRICH:** As KPIX 5's Susie Steimle explains, the site has seen nearly a dozen wildfires over the past few decades. And the state says it's just too dangerous.

**SUSIE STEIMLE:** The LNU Complex Fire tore through five North Bay counties, raging for 47 straight days. It killed six, injured five, and scorched 363,000 acres of earth. The development site for the Guenoc Valley Project was vacant when fire passed through. But it will soon be home to more than 1,000 Californians and serve as a luxury hotel escape.

**PETER BRODERICK:** The most important thing we need to do in California is to start building new communities in very high risk wildfire areas.

**SUSIE STEIMLE:** Peter Broderick is a staff attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity. He's part of a team that filed a lawsuit challenging the county's decision to approve this project.

**TIFFANY YAP:** If a development is put in this area, the likelihood that a fire is going to occur there is extremely high. And it really is a matter of when, not if.

**PETER BRODERICK:** And when we filed our lawsuit, challenging the county's decision, the project site was literally on fire.

SUSIE STEIMLE: The Guenoc Valley Project is a sprawling 16,000-acre website about 15 miles north of Calistoga. It's said to be world-renowned luxury hotelier Adrian Zecha's latest masterpiece. It will create 850 hotel rooms, 1,400 residential villas, boast world-class wines, a golf course, and polo fields. It could also boost the economy of struggling Lake County and place workforce housing on site. It is situated inside what CALFIRE calls a high-fire hazard severity zone, meaning the state fire maps show it is expected to burn in the next 30 to 50 years.

TIFFANY YAP: The county supervisors, I mean, I don't think they did their homework.

SUSIE STEIMLE: Lake County supervisors voted to approve this project 4 to 1. All five of them denied our request for an interview as did the developer. But they knew that this site was in a fire prone area, and actually worked with Cal Fire on the construction plan. In a statement, the developer said, "We have spent countless hours working with scientists at UC Berkeley and CALFIRE to make sure the project is safer than it is today-- from a fire suppression system to underground utilities and 72 miles of fire breaks. We will also build a new fire station to serve the project."

Well, there's a lot of steps that have to be put in place for a project like this to be approved for good reason. And it was approved. Why is that not enough?

PETER BRODERICK: California has an affordable housing crisis. And this project does nothing to address that crisis. This project is a playground for the 1%.

SUSIE STEIMLE: California's attorney general is also stepping in. His office filed a motion to intervene, saying the people of Lake County deserve to know about increased risks from a new development. Research shows that the sprawl itself is a large part of the problem, as people cause 95% of wildfires.

TIFFANY YAP: Now, researchers estimate that up to 1.2 million new homes will be in the highest fire risk areas by 2050. And that's just not a good future for us.

SUSIE STEIMLE: The attorney general's latest motion signifies his concern for building in the wildland urban interface at a statewide level. In fact, there's legislation recently introduced, SB-55, that would ban any new development in these high fire prone areas. Susie Steimle, KPIX 5.