



Wayne Wilson Class of 2026

Wayne Wilson graduated from Oroville High School in 1973 and built a life defined by public service, leadership, and dedication to his community. For nearly sixty years, Oroville was his home, where he lived, worked, and earned a reputation as a respected fire service professional, archaeologist, photographer, author, and volunteer.

Wayne's family moved to Oroville in 1960 from Enterprise, a small community along the South Fork of the Feather River that would later be inundated by Lake Oroville. He attended Oroville elementary schools, Central School, and eventually Oroville High School. While at OHS, Wayne earned a Block O in football and track and participated in the theater program. He credits his high school years with shaping his future through friendships, activities, and influential classes taught by Ron Loch, Ed Hottell, and Mr. Kramer. Those experiences sparked lifelong interests in public service, photography, and archaeology.

Two weeks after graduating from Oroville High School, Wayne reported for duty at the CAL Fire station in Stirling City, beginning a distinguished 33-year fire service career serving Butte County. During that career, he held numerous positions with CAL Fire and the Oroville Fire Department, steadily advancing through the ranks.

From 1980 to 1984, Wayne served with the Oroville Fire Department, attaining the rank of Battalion Chief and Fire Marshal at age 26. In that role, he oversaw fire code enforcement, investigations, and suppression operations. He later returned to CAL Fire, where he served as a command center officer, Battalion Chief, Emergency Command Center Chief, Vegetation Management Coordinator, and ultimately Assistant Chief of the CAL Fire/Butte County Fire administrative division.

Throughout his career, Wayne responded to hundreds of emergencies, including fires, hazardous materials incidents, rescues, and major regional disasters. He played key roles during events such as the Oroville U-2 aircraft crash, the Concow and Poe Fires, and the Oroville Dam spillway emergency. Following his retirement in 2006, he continued serving as a CAL Fire liaison to the Butte County Emergency Operations Center, including the Camp Fire in 2018.

Wayne's leadership extended beyond emergency response. He helped implement the county's early 911 system, assisted in developing cooperative fire protection plans between agencies, and served as an instructor and regional coordinator for fire behavior training, helping train future firefighters. His professionalism earned numerous recognitions, including the Sons of the American Revolution Fire Fighting Commendation Medal and graduation at the top of his class from the CAL Fire Lone Fire Academy.

Retirement allowed Wayne to pursue another lifelong dream. He attended California State University, Chico, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology in 2009 and

graduating magna cum laude. He then worked as a staff archaeologist with Chico State's Archaeological Research Program and later as an archaeologist for the United States Forest Service. In those roles, he helped investigate, document, and preserve significant archaeological sites throughout Northern California.

Photography has played an important role throughout Wayne's life. What began as a childhood hobby evolved into a recognized artistic pursuit. His landscape, cityscape, and weather photography have appeared in magazines, books, calendars, galleries, visitor guides, and businesses throughout Northern California. In 2017, after capturing his widely recognized photograph *Ominous Morning* during the Wall Fire, Wayne donated proceeds from print sales to the North Valley Animal Disaster Group, reflecting his commitment to helping others.

In 2018, Wayne co-authored *Spillway Emergency* with retired fire chief Bill Sager, documenting Oroville's flood history and the emergency response to the Oroville Dam spillway crisis. The book remains an important record of one of the region's most significant events.

Wayne has also devoted countless hours to community service. He has presented fire safety programs in local schools, encouraged students to pursue careers in public service, served on the board of the Oroville Concert Association, and helped organize multiple Oroville High School Class of 1973 reunions.

Wayne Wilson's accomplishments span public safety, archaeology, photography, writing, and community service. More importantly, they reflect a life of humility, dedication, and service. Throughout his career and retirement, Wayne has remained committed to preserving local history, mentoring others, and strengthening the community he has always called home.

Wayne and his wife Lisa make their home in Hamilton, Montana.