

Gray Whale going for \$12.75 million

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SANTA CRUZ — The Save-the-Redwoods League is buying the Gray Whale Ranch, a parcel of land near UC Santa Cruz that conservationists have long been trying to save from timber harvesting and development, a real estate agent said.

"My guess is that it's a 99.9 percent done deal," said agent Leroy Rockelman, who represents ranch owner Ron Yanke.

The league is buying the entire 2,300-acre ranch for \$12.75 million, said Rockelman, of Thunderbird Real Estate in Capitola.

It will take over the ranch by the first week of January, he said Wednesday night.

"The property will become public land," reads a league statement that announces a "significant acquisition," but doesn't mention the ranch by name.

The acquisition will "provide an important bridge

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between existing state, city of Santa Cruz and University of California lands," it reads.

Parts of the ranch lie between Wilder Ranch State Park and UC Santa Cruz.

Mineral rights on the land remain an unresolved issue, Rockelman said, but will almost certainly be settled. Otherwise, he said, "Everything's a go."

Santa Cruz City Councilwoman Celia Scott, who had long fought development and logging efforts on the ranch, said she was thrilled by news of the deal.

The county had protested logging plans there as recently as this spring. Officials said the ranch is home to many species of plants, animals, insects and mushrooms so rare they are known to exist nowhere else in the world.

Yanke put the property up for sale this spring, after battling for 8 years for permission to develop it. One proposal would have built 45 or 50 luxury homes.

Yanke had been asking \$14.5 million for the ranch, having paid \$5 million for it in 1988. But Rockelman said that by taking \$12.75 million, Yanke is selling for below market value and may be able to take advantage of tax breaks that come with making a donation.

Rockelman said Yanke called him Monday to tell him of the deal, and on Wednesday, Rockelman met with league attorneys to work out the details.

He said he is surprised that a deal on the land was finally made. "There's been so many attempts of people to try to raise the money to buy it," but no one could get the money together — until now, he said.

Save-the-Redwoods League is a non-profit national conservation group based in San Francisco. It has acquired a number of parcels in Santa Cruz County, including several it donated to Nisene Marks State Park in Aptos and Henry Cowell State Park in Felton.

Save-the-Redwoods plans a news conference at 11 a.m. today to announce the acquisition of "2,300 acres of Redwood ecosystem lands."