

Gray Whale owners fined for land damage

Sentinel staff report

SANTA CRUZ — The owners of Gray Whale Ranch have agreed to pay \$8,568 in fines to settle a case of illegal grading on the scenic property next to Wilder Ranch.

The settlement "was an economic decision on our part and to get this thing behind us," Yanke's attorney, Steve Worthley, said Wednesday. "We don't believe we did anything wrong."

County prosecutors sued the owner, Idaho businessman Ron Yanke, last month, claiming that grading work completed a year ago on an old oxen trail at the south end of the ranch violated several state and county laws. The penalties could have totaled as much as \$50,000, prosecutors said.

The grading occurred in November 1992 on a mile-long path built

in the mid-1800s as a main road into Santa Cruz. The county alleged the owner failed to get permits from the state Department of Fish and Game and the county for grading near a stream.

The road is located on part of the 2,319-acre ranch where Yanke hopes to build 73 luxury homes. County officials have not approved the proposal. An environmental impact report on the project is expected to be completed next year.

The path is a proposed secondary access for the housing project and grading was done illegally in preparation for the development, county prosecutors alleged in the lawsuit.

Worthley argued the work was done only for maintenance reasons.