

Another logging debate looms

BY PAUL ROGERS
Mercury News Staff Writer

Two months after state forestry officials rejected plans to log 124 acres of redwood trees on Gray Whale Ranch, owners of the rural Santa Cruz County property have submitted new applications to harvest timber on two sites totaling 301 acres.

Meanwhile, Gray Whale property manager John Steinbacher has told associates he has grown so tired of constant environmental battles surrounding the scenic ranch that he is making plans to move to Idaho and resign his

post.

"It's been extraordinarily frustrating," said Steinbacher on Thursday. "I'm used to having more fun in my life."

Gray Whale Ranch lies between Wilder Ranch State Park and the University of California, Santa Cruz. It is a 2,319-acre mosaic of deeply wooded canyons and sweeping meadows providing breathtaking views of Monterey Bay.

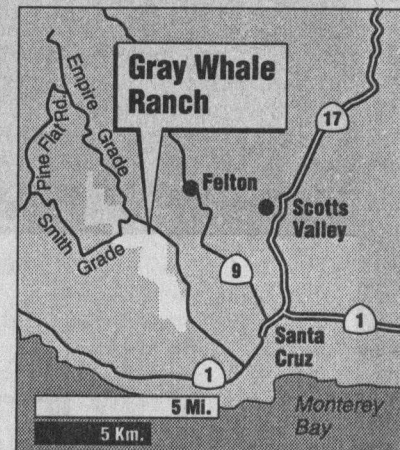
Since he purchased the property in 1988, owner Ron Yanke of Boise, Idaho, has tried unsuccessfully to log second-growth red-

woods and Douglas fir trees four times. Every harvest plan has either been denied by the state, withdrawn or killed by a lawsuit.

The two latest applications were filed March 4 and 5 with the state Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regional headquarters in Santa Rosa.

The proposals are certain to come under scrutiny from Santa Cruz County environmental groups and liberal political leaders, who are trying to preserve the ranch as a

See RANCH, Page 2B



CARL NEIBURGER — MERCURY NEWS

'We don't want to go through all the anger and hostility again. We want some direction.'

Ranch owner submits another timber proposal

■ RANCH

from Page 1B

park but do not have the estimated \$10 million needed to buy it.

One of the new applications calls for cutting the same site that was denied by the state Board of Forestry. Located in the Peasley Gulch section of the property, the 124-acre area was last logged in 1976. On Jan. 6, county supervisors successfully appealed a decision by local CDF officials to allow logging, arguing that the timber plan was inadequate because it did not address Yanke's plan to subdivide 73 lots in the same area for luxury homes.

The other application is for a 177-acre area in the northern half of Gray Whale near Majors Creek. No homes are proposed for that site. Also logged in the mid-'70s, the site sits adjacent to the intersection of Smith Grade and Empire Grade roads.

Both sites are zoned for logging. They would be selectively harvested. Loggers would remove between 40 and 50 percent of trees larger than 18 inches in diameter.

Opposition group

Save the Gray Whale Parklands, one of the groups that has opposed logging on the property in the past, has already lined up against the 124-acre proposal, arguing that it is no different from the application the state denied two months ago.

As for the 177-acre section, "We'll have to look at the plans," said Celia Scott, a spokeswoman for the group.

Because of a recent boom in lumber prices, more timber applications for Gray Whale will be proposed this year, said Steve Worthley, a Fresno attorney representing Yanke.

"That's a very valuable commodity," Worthley said Thursday. "We need to be accessing it."

Revised proposal

Worthley said plans for Peasley Gulch are different from the proposal denied Jan. 6 because they provide a more detailed analysis of the cumulative environmental effects of logging and proposed construction of houses.

CDF officials have taken the unusual step of referring the plans to the state Attorney General's Office for review for a legal opinion before beginning field studies and public hearings.

"We don't want to go through all the anger and hostility again," said Nancy Drinkard, a CDF forest practice officer based in Felton. "We want some direction."