

Vandals hit Grey Whale again

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EMPIRE GRADE — For the third time since Earth Day, vandals early Friday struck the Grey Whale Ranch, tearing up more than 500 feet of barbed wire fence and letting nearly 50 cattle loose to trample over a UC Santa Cruz natural reserve and block traffic on Empire Grade.

The vandals also cut the barbed wire fence into small pieces and scattered the sharp bits of wire over the fields of the natural reserve. Hundreds of pieces of wire had been picked up by Saturday afternoon, yet sharp strands still seemed to

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be everywhere on the ground.

"This is not the way to save the environment," said Margaret Fusari, UCSC Natural Reserve coordinator.

"I wish I knew who it was because the next sound you'd hear would be an explosion at their place," said Dan Stahlman,

UCSC superintendent of grounds and equipment.

The cattle were discovered by commuters on their way to work who screeched to a stop on the road at about 6:30 a.m. Friday.

No one was hurt in the resulting traffic

jam as workers herded the cattle back onto ranch land about three miles up Empire Grade from UCSC. But those in charge of the ranch and the reserve expressed outrage Friday at what they said was the third attack on the properties since Earth Day, April 22.

"The cattle are totally innocent and their lives are endangered as well as the lives of the people who use Empire Grade," said John Steinbacher, representative for owners of the Grey Whale Ranch.

Steinbacher has reported numerous instances of vandalism to the ranch's fences

in the past few years, as well as vandalism to his Live Oak home and to his jeep, which he says has had its tires slashed 14 times while sitting in his driveway.

He has said he believes that anger over a stalled drive to buy the land for a park is behind the destruction. Plans announced two years ago to log 310 of the 2,400 acres sparked a lawsuit and a drive to buy the ranch. Only \$300,000 has been raised, and the ranch recently went on the market for \$11 million. In March, owners Ron and Linda Yanke proposed a plan to create 75 to 80 homesites on part

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of the ranch, and to donate environmentally sensitive land to UCSC to preserve, and other land to build a performing arts center on.

Jodi Frediani of Save The Grey Whale Parklands, the group which has actively fought timber harvesting and development of the ranch, said Saturday that her group had nothing to do with the vandalism.

"I don't take people's fences down and I don't recommend it," Frediani said. "That's not my way of creating a better world."

Steinbacher said the vandals apparently came as a group with a large truck. Two 14-foot steel gates were torn out of the fence along with steel fence posts before the fence itself was ripped apart. He said sheriff's investigators suspect the vandals may be the same group that tore down power lines in Santa Cruz County. "It's the same tactics," Steinbacher said.

The vandals are not only hitting the fence around Grey Whale Ranch, they are also tearing up the fences and stealing the gates that protect the UC reserve, according to Stahlman. "It's cost us more than \$5,000 in the last month and

it's not accomplishing a damn thing," Stahlman said.

Steinbacher said it took 12 men to rebuild both the UC and ranch fences Friday after the cattle had been herded back on to ranch land.

Steinbacher said he was sure the vandalism was the act of eco-terrorists, but that he knew little else about them. "They come in groups, they wear gloves, they must have a big truck," he said. "But we don't really know anything about them."

Steinbacher said he simply does not have the resources to patrol the ranch 24 hours a day. "It's a giant property and it's very difficult to be everywhere at once at all hours of the day," Steinbacher said.

He added that environmentalists had protested his grazing of more than 350 cattle that he owns on the ranch land, but argued that the cattle actually "are the most effective way to remove dry grass" and cut down on the chances of grass fires on the ranch.

"Nobody that cared about the environment would do this," Steinbacher said as he looked at a short piece of barbed wire he'd picked up from the field.