

GRAY WHALE RANCH

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# Gray Whale Ranch plan shelved

■ The Idaho developer who owns the property is waiting to see who wins the November election for county supervisor.

BY PAUL ROGERS  
Mercury News Staff Writer

An Idaho developer who has battled environmentalists for years over scenic Gray Whale Ranch in Santa Cruz County has suddenly withdrawn his plans for a housing subdivision there, plunging the county's most controversial land-use debate into uncertainty.

Owner Ron Yanke of Boise

wanted to create 73 residential lots, a swimming complex and an equestrian center on Gray Whale Ranch. A 2,319-acre landscape of redwood forests, meadows and panoramic ocean views, the ranch lies between Wilder Ranch State Park and the University of California, Santa Cruz campus.

Despite spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on the project since 1992, last week Yanke

decided to wait and see who wins an election for Santa Cruz County supervisor Nov. 8 before spending any more.

"We felt it was time to draw the line, given the political risks," said Steve Worthley, a Fresno attorney representing Yanke.

In a letter July 5 to county planners, Worthley rescinded the development application, which kills the project. New plans still could be submitted later.

As Yanke sees it, the housing plans will have a better chance if Annette Hopkins wins the race for Third District county supervisor, Worthley said. Hopkins is

former president of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce.

Her opponent, former Santa Cruz Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt, has said she would not vote to allow any houses on Gray Whale. Hopkins has not taken a firm position.

Facing \$200,000 in new costs for an environmental impact statement, Yanke decided to pull back until he knows which way the political winds will be blowing. A final decision on the ranch probably will be made during the four-year term of the next supervisor.

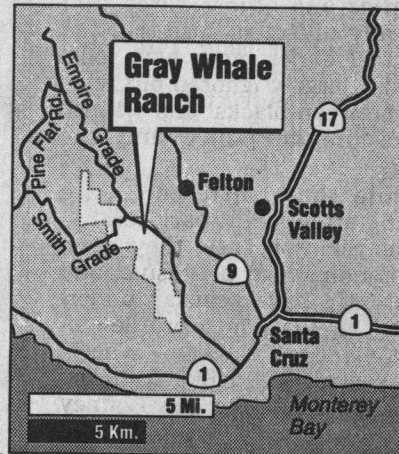
"We feel we'd have a reason-

able opportunity to present our case if Annette Hopkins were elected," Worthley said. "That would not be the case if Wormhoudt were elected."

With Hopkins, he said, "at least we'd have a fighting chance."

Yanke bought Gray Whale Ranch in 1988 for \$5 million. He has been to court numerous times in logging disputes with local environmental groups that staunchly oppose any change in Gray Whale Ranch's bucolic character. Preservationists want the land to become a state park but do not have the estimated \$10 million

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CARL NEIBURGER — MERCURY NEWS

# Gray Whale Ranch plan is withdrawn

## ■ WHALE

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needed to buy it.

Yanke also has spent "in the high six figures" on architect's drawings, legal fees and studies of geology, water, plants and animals, Worthley said.

This year, about 300 acres of second-growth redwood have been selectively logged on the ranch. An application to harvest another 160 acres is pending with the state.

The land is zoned for logging and agriculture. To allow houses, the board of supervisors would have to change the county's general plan.

## Swing vote

Whoever wins — Hopkins or Wormhoudt — is seen as the key third vote on the five-member board who could make or break the housing project.

Gary Patton, the current Third District supervisor, has spent 20 years in office scuttling plans like Yanke's along the rural north coast of Santa Cruz County as part of a staunch slow-growth agenda.

Patton said Wednesday he fears Yanke will resubmit plans for more than 73 houses if Hopkins wins.

"This will either be a pro-development board if Annette Hopkins wins or it will continue to be an environmentally conscious board if Mardi wins," Patton said.

Hopkins called such comments "scare tactics."

She said she hopes to preserve the ranch but is willing to negoti-

ate with Yanke if funds cannot be found to buy it as a park.

"I'm willing to listen to these folks," she said. "I'm not as black and white as Mardi is."

Asked whether she favored limited development in trade for the rest of the ranch as parkland, Hopkins said she has not made up her mind.

"I don't know," she said. "Is it fair for me not to know?"

Hopkins added that she has not read Yanke's application to develop the property.

## 'Not fully informed'

"I don't know about all the zonings and things," she said. "I am not fully informed. I just don't know enough about the plan to comment. I don't have anything to say."

Wormhoudt has made preserving Gray Whale Ranch a centerpiece of her campaign but has not put forward a plan to come up with the money to pay for it.

She said she was alarmed at Yanke's decision to withdraw the housing plan.

"At least before, we had issues on the table," Wormhoudt said. "Now there's no telling what to expect. To me, it's a source of very great concern."

It is likely Yanke will resubmit development plans after the November election, Worthley said. He said no decision has been made on how many houses they could include.

Yanke did not return telephone calls seeking comment.

More than 3,000 people have signed petitions opposing development plans.