

✓ Another delay for Grey Whale Ranch logging

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SANTA CRUZ — A plan to log 310 acres of the Grey Whale Ranch will be delayed until late July to allow the logging company to search for signs of rare truffles and complete other environmental studies on the property.

The county Planning Commission Wednesday voted unanimously to postpone review of the logging plan for the 2,400-acre ranch near UC Santa Cruz, after the lumber company's forester agreed to the eight-month delay. Forester Mark Hannon, speaking for the Redwood Empire lumber company, agreed to initiate several studies requested by the Planning Commission.

Redwood Empire will map the nesting sites of several bird species, search for owls living on the property; search for truffles and determine the effect its logging trucks will have on the Bay and Mission street intersection.

Trained pigs are commonly used to locate truffles, a type of fungus that grows underground, but due to the number of feral pigs that roam the Grey Whale Ranch, Hannon said he doubts many truffles will be found.

"With the number of feral pigs out there, I'll be surprised if they find truffles, or salamanders or anything," he said. "But we'll do the studies. We'll follow all the rules."

Ranch owners Ron and Linda Yanke have been fighting to harvest timber on the Grey Whale since early 1988, but their efforts have been stalled by activists who want the ranch purchased for a state park.

Until recently, the Yankes owned Sequoia Forest Industries. Sequoia sold its Soledad sawmill and several timber properties to Redwood Empire. Redwood Empire owns sawmills in Cloverdale and Philo, and has corporate offices in Morgan Hill, Hannon said. In addition to cutting trees and milling lumber, Redwood Empire does home and fence construction, Hannon said.

The Yankes still own the Grey Whale Ranch, but Redwood Empire has bought limited timber rights to the ranch.

The plan to log 310 acres on the southern portion of the ranch was approved following a heated battle before the state Board of Forestry and an appeal by the county. No county permits are required for the logging, but the Planning Commission has the right to review the plan under the provisions of an open-space easement on the property.