

Grey Whale makes a change

Development has new plan, and new name

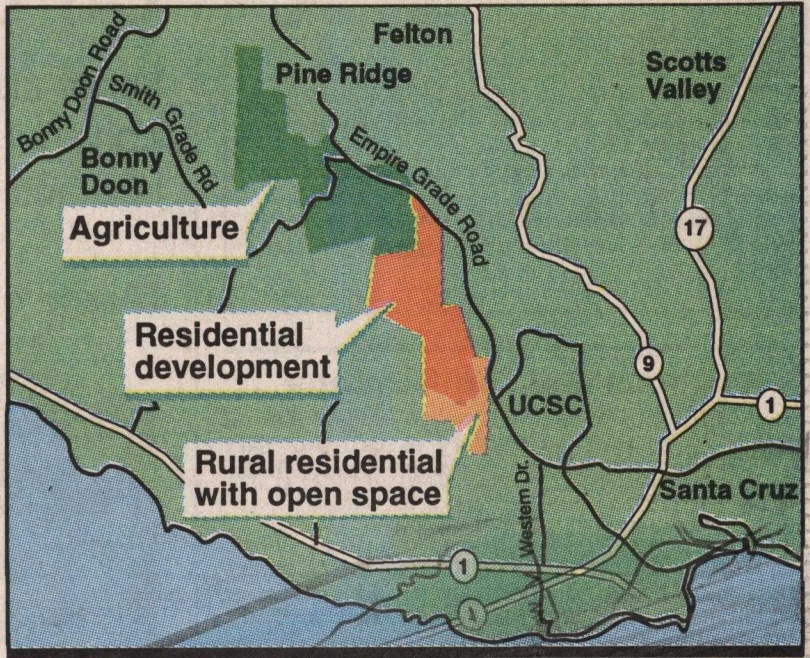
By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

5-21-92

SANTA CRUZ — The owners of the Grey Whale Ranch have renamed the property La Cumbre — "The Summit" — and submitted a new development plan to the county calling for 73 luxury homes on land across from UC Santa Cruz.

The proposal also calls for the donation of "millions" of dollars to local charities from ranch timber harvests, and for the opening of 200 acres for additional public access to Wilder Ranch State Park.

"We've gone to extraordinary lengths to conform to county poli-



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Grey Whale Ranch

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cies," said John Steinbacher, a representative of ranch owner Ron Yanke. "It's absolutely buildable. ... It's the best thing for the owners and for the community."

Development of the 2,319-acre ranch, one of the largest undeveloped parcels adjacent to the city limits, has been fought by environmental activists since its purchase in 1988 by Yanke, an Idaho industrialist, for \$5.4 million in cash. They claim the latest proposal for private homes there, like those past, runs counter to county land-use policies and will open the North Coast up to building.

Whether the county Planning Department accepts the proposal remains to be seen.

Andy Schiffrin, an aide to Supervisor Gary Patton, who represents the North Coast, said he had not read the new plan, but doubts that the development as proposed could be built under county regulations.

"As far as what the staff has said, there's just no way under the rules that 73 units could be approved," Schiffrin said. "If the board (of supervisors) approved it, the implication is that we would have to change all the rules and this would set a dangerous precedent."



Steinbacher

The proposal includes:

• **Housing** — The 73 luxury homes would be built on meadow edges overlooking the ocean, as well as a private tennis and swim-

ming club and horse stables. The homes would be on private 1.3-acre parcels with common ownership of the meadow.

The homes would be hidden from view along Empire Grade and developed land would be about 76 acres — 3.4 percent of the total acreage, Steinbacher said.

• **Community benefits** — The Yanke family would harvest timber on the upper third of the ranch, keeping $\frac{1}{3}$ of the timber revenues, while donating the remainder to the Greater Santa Cruz Foundation for local uses.

The value of the proposed donations has not been determined, but Steinbacher said given current timber prices, the amount "would be millions in a few years."

• **Public access** — About 200 acres would be opened to the public on the south end of the ranch, in the Cave Gulch area, for an Empire Grade Road access to Wilder Ranch State Park.

Over the past several years, county planning staff has said that between 15 and 45 houses could be built on the site under current regulations.

Steinbacher said those estimates are in error because inaccurate maps and studies were used to determine how much of the land is agricultural and ecologically sensitive.

The planning department has 30 days to decide whether the plans are complete. Once accepted as complete, an environmental impact report will be prepared by the landowners before it is submitted for approval to the Board of Supervisors.

A number of public hearings will be held along the way, and opposition is expected.

Several environmental groups, including "Save The Grey Whale Park Lands" have attempted to have the state and other agencies buy the land for use as a park, but have been unsuccessful.

"I don't think he (Steinbacher) has a chance," attorney Celia Scott said, a spokeswoman for Save the Grey Whale Park Lands. "He's a dreamer. ... The project description proposes to amend the current general plan."

"We know there is a group of people who consistently oppose anything, anywhere," Steinbacher said. "It's (development) not going to go away. This is America. We have fourth amendment rights."

Steinbacher claimed that much of the opposition to development of the land is due to misconceptions of what is there. According to Steinbacher, the property contains no old-growth redwoods or endangered plants or animal species.

"A member of the Coastal Commission recently called me and asked if it was untouched rainforest," Steinbacher said. "This has been heavily worked-over land for 200 years. There have been cattle and horses and it has been clear-cut twice."

Even so, the ranchlands represent some of the most beautiful property in the county with sweeping ocean views, rolling forests and golden meadows.

Steinbacher said the ranch was renamed to bring it closer to its roots, and that part of the land was called La Cumbre by the early Spanish settlers.

According to Schiffrin, the name doesn't matter.

"They can call it anything they want. The public will still call it 'Grey Whale Ranch,'" he said.