

Grey Whale Ranch funds cut

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GREY WHALE
RANCH

SACRAMENTO — More than \$2 million earmarked to buy part of the Grey Whale Ranch were slashed from the state budget Friday by Gov. George Deukmejian's veto ax.

The loss of the \$2.2 million cigarette-tax appropriation came as a blow to Assemblyman Sam Farr, Sen. Henry Mello and local activists who have been working to buy the 2,300-acre ranch near UC Santa Cruz and Wilder Ranch State Park for a state park.

"It appears that the governor has clear-cut the people's wishes with a chain-saw approach to a well-thought-out, balanced budget," Farr said. "When the governor does

what he did today, it's a real slap in the face to good citizens' efforts."

The \$2.2-million Grey Whale appropriation had been carved from revenues raised through the recently passed Proposition 99 cigarette tax, Farr said. While most of the tax money is earmarked for medical care and health education, a small percentage is also set aside for "natural resources protection."

The Assembly committee that recommended the portioning out of Proposition 99's natural resources money set aside the appraised value of four parcels of the Grey Whale that border Wilder Ranch State Park.

The combined acreage of the four parcels is unclear, but the entire ranch contains about 2,300 acres split into 17 or 18 parcels. The

owners of the ranch, Ron and Linda Yanke, offered to sell the entire ranch to the state for \$8 million before putting it on the open market for \$11 million in January.

The fate of the Grey Whale became a hot local controversy early last year when area residents objected to a logging plan proposed for the property. The ranch is zoned for timber harvesting, and has been harvested several times in the past few decades. Protestors claimed the logging would disturb or destroy populations of wild plants and animals living on the site, as well as reducing the enjoyment of thousands of trespassers who hike, bike, spelunk, camp and party on the property.

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After a long administrative process and many appeals, a logging plan was given final approval by the State Board of Forestry in March. That decision has since been challenged in court by the Sierra Club, a citizen's group and the County of Santa Cruz. In addition, the logging plan will be the subject of a hearing before the county Planning Commission Wednesday.

The county Planning Department has the authority to review timber harvests in the county, though it does not have the authority to deny them outright once they are approved by the forestry board.

The Wednesday meeting is likely to focus on an open-space easement granted to the county by a previous owner of the Grey Whale, according to County Planner Ken Hart. The hearing will be at 1:30 p.m. July 12 at the county Supervisors Chamber.

Despite the blow, Farr said he is

not done fighting for money to buy the ranch.

"We can always hope," he said. "We just have to pick ourselves up when we get knocked down."

Farr noted that the Proposition 99 funding that was vetoed must still be spent on parks, but he was not optimistic about persuading the governor to reinstate funding for the Grey Whale. The Legislature still has five weeks to negotiate the budget cuts with the governor, but Farr predicted that legislators would be too busy fighting to save funding for the Coastal Commission to spend much time on the Grey Whale.

On the positive side, Farr noted that a handful of county projects have been spared. The Food Service Technology Program at Cabrillo College was allocated \$700,000, Farr said, and funds to install a guardrail along West Cliff Drive and improve Lighthouse Field State Beach were also left intact.