

GRAY WHALE RANCH

✓ County 'dropped the ball' on Grey Whale, Patton says

By GUY LASNIER
Sentinel staff writer

3-8-80
SANTA CRUZ — The county "dropped the ball" by not taking advantage earlier of an open-space easement for Grey Whale Ranch, Supervisor Gary Patton said Wednesday.

The 20-year easement allowing public access to the 2,300-acre ranch west of Empire Grade Road was granted in 1972 by the previous owner, the Cowell Foundation, in exchange for tax breaks.

Under its terms, the owner would allow the public to use trails provided the county develops, maintains and polices the trails.

But the easement was not "self implementing," Patton said. The

county had to enter a formal written agreement with the owner.

He said the county never pursued it because the Cowell Foundation were "congenial owners" and "there was no real problem."

The county is currently trying to activate the 18-year-old agreement. Tuesday, the Board of Supervisors approved a trail map for the area and asked the County Counsel and Department of Parks, Open Space and Cultural Activities to draft an agreement. Board Chairwoman Robley Levy will formally write to the ranch owners requesting the agreement.

"We're doing now what should have been done 20 years ago," Patton said. He called for a report in a

month on the progress of negotiations.

The effort to activate the easement follows the decision by ranch owners Ron and Linda Yanke to limit public access to the ranch. The scenic property has long been a favorite of hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians. The owners' representative said liability problems forced him to enforce no trespassing laws.

The ranch has been the focus of continual wrangling between its owners and the county. A hearing is scheduled for March 23 in Sacramento on a lawsuit the county filed to keep the current Yankes from cutting timber on 310 acres.