

# Gray Whale Ranch goes up for sale

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SANTA CRUZ — After an 8-year battle to develop parts of the Gray Whale Ranch on the North Coast, landowner Ron Yanke has put the property up for sale for the second time in four years.

Yanke is asking \$14.5 million for the 2,300-acre site which borders UC Santa Cruz along Empire Grade Road, nearly three times the amount he paid for it.

Real-estate agent Leroy Rockelman of Thunderbird Real Estate in Capitola said his client is busy with other, more developable lands he owns, such as 20,000 acres he recently acquired in Montana.

"He'd just as soon get rid of it because it's taking so much time and effort to get things done," Rockelman said Thursday.

While Yanke would like to see the parcel stay intact, Rockelman said, he thinks some of the 15 individual parcels could be spun off the main portion, with one home allowed on each parcel. Parcel sizes vary from 15 to 624 acres.

Failed attempts to develop the property include efforts to build 45 homes on 2.5-acre sites, and 73 luxury homes on 1.3-acre parcels. An attempt by environmentalists to save the land from development failed in 1994, when voters rejected a state-parks bond measure that could have provided money to buy the land.

Santa Cruz City Councilwoman Celia Scott, who has long fought development and logging efforts on the property, said she doesn't believe the property will be any easier to develop once it's sold, since it still will be regulated by current county restrictions.

"What can you say? \$14.5 million is a lot of money, considering it was purchased for only \$5 million in 1988. The only difference is, a lot of trees are gone," said Scott, who helped start the Save the Gray Whale Parklands.

To date, three logging projects have been approved on the site and two are pending. One proposed project will be heard by the state Board of Forestry at a local hearing April 15.

Scott said her group "is still concerned that timber harvesting on the property is done properly. We have some important species there, and a pretty beautiful space."

An ad published in the Sentinel calls the property "2,300 acres of the most beautiful land in Santa Cruz County." It boasts 1,600 acres of redwoods and other forest land; 250 acres of pasture, sweeping ocean views, 15 separate tax parcels and seven wells.

Rockelman said he believes 45 to 50 homes is a reasonable number on the property. That's the number that could be reached if one home is built every 40 acres, which is "what the state would like to see on a timber property," Rockelman said.