

State OKs Gray Whale timber plan

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SANTA CRUZ — A plan to log 80 acres of the Gray Whale Ranch won approval of the state Board of Forestry on Monday despite the concerns of Santa Cruz County officials and environmentalists.

The board unanimously denied the county's appeal of the timber harvest plan, clearing the way for the fourth of nine proposed harvests.

"It gives the go-ahead for one more piece of property to be logged," said a disappointed Ida Hills, an opponent of the plan. "It casts a shadow on other plans coming up. It looks like they still won't hear us."

Hills told the board that the 2,300-acre ranch is for sale and the logging plan was either an attempt to "cut and run" or to gain an enrichment toward a sale.

At 80 acres, the harvest of redwoods and some Douglas firs is one of the smallest proposed for the site. A separate, 192-acre logging proposal is under review by the state Department of Forestry.

The board could grant or deny the county's appeal, but could not change the proposal. The three members hearing the appeal — Richard Rogers, Robert Heald and Nikki Clay — listened to two hours of discussion before ruling.

About 30 people attended the hearing at the Santa Cruz County Governmental Center.

Kirby Molen, representative of Gray Whale owner Ron Yanke, urged the board to treat the logging plan as if it were any other proposal.

"Remove the name Gray Whale from it," he said. "We're held to a higher standard. ... This is a good, thorough timber harvest plan."

Adjacent to the UC Santa Cruz campus, the ranch has drawn attention because of citizen efforts to acquire the land as an addition to Wilder Ranch State Park.

"It is a refuge for species of concern," said Dave Hope, county forester and resource planner.

In its appeal, the county said the ranch is home to many species of plants, animals and insects as well as mushrooms so rare they are known to exist nowhere else in the world.

Logging opponents attacked the proposal, saying that a cumulative analysis of the harvesting effects on Gray Whale is desperately need-

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ed, but has not been performed.

"We need better cumulative effects," Hope agreed, pointing out that one question is whether animals have been displaced from the timber areas.

Hope also raised concerns that cattle on the property are damaging the environment.

Molen said about 40 cows have been moved to the southern portion of the property. He added he will work with the county on addressing the concerns.