

Gray Whale Ranch Revisited

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Just when we thought recent bids to turn the 2,400-acre Gray Whale Ranch into timber fodder were temporarily waylaid, our sources tell us that yet another timber harvest plan has been filed for the Bonny Doon property.

The Gray Whale Ranch has already been the subject of one unsuccessful timber harvest plan (logging proposal), and a second that was withdrawn after the California Department of Forestry rejected the first.

Now a third—and threats of three additional THPs for various portions of the land—has been discovered thanks to the investigations of Bonny Doon resident Ray Gwyn Smith. Smith, the equestrian who resides on a ranch adjacent to the Gray Whale Ranch and first investigated timbering ribbons on the ranch last spring, discovered notices announcing THP number three on a routine ramble through Gray Whale last week.

This THP covers roughly the same area as the first THP, which was rejected because of a slew of complications that logging may have caused. Among the concerns was the existence of 11 animal species whose populations are in rapid decline, including the Golden Eagle, the Cooper's Hawk and the Longeared Owl. California Department of Forestry investigators also suspected logging would cause a threatening level of

erosion into Majors Creek, a prime source of water for the Santa Cruz Municipal Water District. The logging company, Boise, Idaho-based Sequoia Forest Industries, had not allowed for sufficient study of the sensitive environment, the CDF had charged.

"What they're saying in this THP is, 'Oh, don't worry, we're going to go ahead with this timber harvest and we'll study the effects afterwards,'... It's a bit back-asswards," noted Smith, who received a copy of the 46-page document from the Felton office of the CDF.

Needless to say, the logging application is fairly specific. For instance, according to Sequoia's estimations in the THP, 15 logging trucks would leave and return to the site a day, something Smith and members of the Save the Gray Whale Parklands decry as dangerous. The trucks would presumably go through the heavily trafficked Bay and Mission intersection, which has been targeted by the county department of transportation as one of the most dangerous in Santa Cruz.

The plan also calls for three ensuing THPs which, in their entirety, would cover the Majors Creek watershed area. Environmentalists argue this land must be left intact so as to ensure proper flow of water into the creek and down into the city water supply.

Sequoia owner Ron Yanke—en



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who is involved in engineering the park purchase. "This doesn't mean that the park deal is falling through. The owner, like everyone in this process, is trying to keep his options open," he said.

According to Keeley, the parklands group is still trying to scare up funding to make the purchase a reality. State parks commissioners are in the process of divvying up money received from Proposition 70 last June; some of that money may go to purchase Gray Whale lands. Keeley also said SGWP is applying for foundation

grants while the San Francisco-based Trust for Public Land is continuing to assess the value of the land so as to expedite its purchase.

A public hearing on the third THP will take place in the board of supervisors chambers before the California Department of Forestry this December 15. Save the Gray Whale Parklands is also holding an auction to raise money to pay for legal fees incurred in their attempts to thwart all three THPs. The auction will be at 2pm on December 11. Call 429-2076 for the location.

route to California when *The Sun* attempted to contact him about the THP—was unavailable for comment.

The real shock to environmentalist guardians of this property, however, was that they thought Yanke and Sequoia were ready to enter into a deal to sell the land to the state for parkland. Elected officials and ad hoc parks enthusiasts organized into the group Save the Gray Whale Parklands have already received an offer from Yanke, who said he was willing to sell a 300-acre portion of the land for \$5.4 million with a \$200,000, nonrefundable down payment.

"We do not see it as a bad faith move," commented Fred Keeley, chief of staff to Assemblymember Sam Farr,