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# Gray Whale developer withdraws

By JOHN BESSA

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The owner of Gray Whale Ranch has withdrawn his bid to build 73 houses on the land, citing uncertainty over the outcome of the Third District supervisor election in November.

"We had gotten to point of advancing sizable sums for an environmental impact report," said Steve Worthley, attorney for Gray Whale owner Ron Yanke of Idaho. "We felt that it was just basically a wager of over \$200,000," he said, referring to the cost of the environmental report.

The two women running for county supervisor have been at odds over what should be done with the 2,300-acre North Coast ranch between Empire Grade Road and Highway 1. Who wins the seat Supervisor Gary Patton will leave in December could decide the fate of the land.

Former Santa Cruz mayor Mardi Wormhoudt says the land should be preserved for public access, and



Hopkins



Wormhoudt

is a "critical link" in keeping the county's wild North Coast undeveloped. To build would "really establish a precedent for North Coast development," Wormhoudt said.

Her opponent, former Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce president Annette Hopkins, was unavailable for comment Wednesday afternoon. But she has said in the past she supported careful development of the land if it were not purchased for park use.

Worthley asked county planning officials to suspend the application

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process, then withdrew the plan last week when the Planning Department refused, said Pete Parkinson, principal planner.

The county had been billing Yanke monthly for services, Worthley said.

Celia Scott, of Save the Gray Whale Ranch, said the owner's withdrawal was late in the development process, but shows Yanke has recognized the significance of who represents the Third District and what will happen to the ranch.

"I think the outcome of the election will be pretty important in regards to the future of the Gray Whale Ranch," she said. "It's nothing

new. Maybe he just tuned in on it."

Wormhoudt said that while Yanke will have a smaller stake in the outcome of the election, the issue of development and logging on the ranch will remain as one of the larger bones of contention.

"My understanding is that Mr. Yanke decided he didn't want it to become a political football ... but I think this puts the issue of (the ranch) at center stage," she said.

Yanke hasn't decided under what circumstances the application for development will be re-submitted, Worthley said.

Whatever happens, the owner's logging early this year after five

years of legal wrangling has given him some return on his investment, Worthley said.

Logging permits allowed him to cut about \$500,000 worth of lumber from 124 acres on the site.

"It's not like we necessarily need to proceed with a development project to in some way get a return on our investment," Worthley said.

The site, fronting Empire Grade Road and bordering UC Santa Cruz and Wilder Ranch State Park, has been farmed, logged, mined and grazed in the past.

The proposed development, titled La Cumbre, includes a private swimming club, equestrian center and tennis club.