

State refuses to block Gray Whale logging plan

By MAY WONG
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — State officials have refused to block plans to log 124 acres at Gray Whale Ranch, but environmental groups say the battle is not over.

The state Board of Forestry in Sacramento unanimously rejected the appeal county supervisors filed on behalf of the opponents, Dean Cromwell, the board's executive officer, said Thursday. Opponents ar-

Environmentalists vow to continue legal wrangling with ranch's owner

gued the timber harvest plan did not fully address the project's environmental impacts.

"I was pleased to see the decision," said Steve Worthley, attorney for the ranch's owner, Idaho businessman Ron Yanke.

But, he said, he knows the victo-

ry is not set in stone.

The state's ruling triggers yet another round of legal wrangling between the ranch's owners and environmentalists who would like to see the scenic property preserved.

This is Yanke's fifth attempt in

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five years to log the 2,300-acre ranch west of Empire Grade Road. Each plan was either denied by the state, withdrawn or killed by a lawsuit.

Save the Gray Whale Parklands, one of the groups opposed to logging on the ranch, expected the state to approve the project, said group spokeswoman Celia Scott.

A lawyer is preparing to file a lawsuit in Sacramento Monday on

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Logging plan

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behalf of the Save the Gray Whale Parklands group, the Sierra Club and Santa Cruz County, she said.

The group, which won a court ruling in 1990 and blocked Yanke's logging plans, will once again challenge the state board's decision and attempt to get a restraining order.

"We feel this land is not being adequately protected," Scott said. "As long as we have the energy, we're going to work on this. People really care about this place. We live here. It's our part of the world, and we care about it."

While their energy has not waned, neither has the owner's.

Yanke is determined to get return on the property, which he purchased in 1988 for \$5.4 million in cash, Worthley said.

In addition to the 124-acre log-

ging project, Yanke has filed a 177-acre logging proposal. He also proposed a 73-unit housing development on the property. That proposal has yet to be approved by the county.

"How long would you fight for a \$5 million investment?" Worthley said. "We're not going to go away. We really have no alternative. This property has timber on it, and it's zoned for timber production. We have confidence that at some point, we're going to succeed."

Yanke "is not going to sit back and do nothing," he said.

Should the environmentalists fail to win a restraining order from the court, timber operators could begin logging the Peasley Gulch area of the property as early as in two weeks, Worthley said.

But that is just hypothetical, he said.