

Gray Whale Ranch Court temporarily lifts logging ban

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Sentinel correspondent

SANTA CRUZ — In a blow to local environmentalists trying to preserve the Gray Whale Ranch, the state Court of Appeal this week lifted an emergency stay on logging in the Peasley Gulch area of the ranch.

The stay, obtained last December, was intended to keep the 124-acre parcel bordering Wilder Ranch State Park from being logged until a court challenge of the plan could be heard March 29.

According to Celia Scott, spokeswoman for the group Save the Gray Whale Parklands, the Court of Appeal lifted the stay Wednesday after receiving a letter from the landowners' attorney.

Scott said she hadn't seen the letter but believed it complained of costs incurred by the owners due to the stay.

An attorney representing Scott's group was in court Thursday asking for another stay, but it was rejected. Their attorney will be back in court next week trying to get the March 29 hearing moved up.

"We are outraged that the legal system will not even give us a chance to have our case heard before the trees get taken down," Scott said.

Scott said she wasn't sure if logging had begun or whether protesters were out because the site can be seen only by trespassing onto the ranch or hiking five miles to the top of Wilder Ranch State Park.

Peasley Gulch drains into Wilder Creek and is home to the red-legged frog, a candidate for endangered species status, Scott said. The frog breeds from January through April.

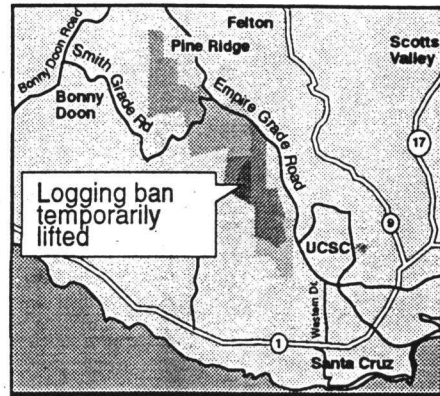
The court's action was the second re-

cent setback for environmentalists hoping to secure the 2,300-acre ranch as a state park. The property spans the hills between Highway 1 and Empire Grade Road north of Santa Cruz and includes sweeping vistas.

In November, Santa Cruz County's request for an appeal hearing on a plan to log 177 acres in the Majors Creek area of the ranch was rejected by the state Board of Forestry.

Logging began on the Majors Creek site last November, but a court order suspended that operation pending a hearing against the plan scheduled for late March.

Gray Whale Ranch has been at the center of a bitter six-year battle pitting environmentalists and the county against the ranch's owners, who have pursued plans to log and develop the ranch since they purchased it in 1988.



Chris Carothers/ Sentinel

Supporters of preserving the ranch as a state park have been trying to block logging operations until money to buy the property is obtained.

Save the Gray Whale Parklands will hold a vigil for the trees and wildlife today at 4:30 p.m. in front of the U.S. Post Office, 850 Front St., Santa Cruz.