

Gray Whale logging continues

Opponents say harvest may be done before court hearing

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SANTA CRUZ — Efforts by environmentalists to halt logging on a 124-acre parcel on Gray Whale Ranch have run into a dead end in the courts.

Logging began last Friday and continued this week at the scenic 2,300-acre ranch, which lies between Empire Grade Road and Highway 1 north of Santa Cruz.

Protesters were out early Wednesday morning holding signs at the entrance to the ranch on Empire Grade Road.

On Monday, protester Chris Rubach, 34, of Berkeley said he and four other people formed a human chain trying to block a tractor heading onto the property.

"The tractor didn't stop so we moved to the side," Rubach said. "I guess he would have run us over."

Protest spokesman Dennis Davie said they plan to have a presence there every day.

The ranch's owner, Idaho businessman Ron Yanke, has tried to log the property since he pur-

chased it in 1988, but opposition from environmental groups and the county Board of Supervisors had successfully stopped him with a combination of lawsuits and appeals to state forestry officials.

"It's been a long, arduous road," said Yanke's attorney, Steve Worthley. "I think Ron's pleased. I know I'm ecstatic."

The Board of Supervisors, along with the Sierra Club and Save the Gray Whale Parklands, filed suit last year to block the timber harvest in the area of the ranch known as Peasley Gulch.

The legal dead end came when the state Court of Appeal last week reversed an earlier decision to delay logging until a March 29 hearing of the suit.

Celia Scott, a spokeswoman for Save the Gray Whale Parklands, said the group's attorney was able to get the hearing moved up to March 7, but logging would be finished before then.

"If there are no trees left, it's very likely the case won't go through," Scott said.

Worthley said loggers are cutting about 80 trees a day. The harvest, which allows cutting a maximum of 60 percent of trees over 18 inches diameter, will be 800,000 feet of timber worth \$500,000.

People opposed to the logging hope the California Parks and Wildlife bond initiative on the state ballot in June will provide up to \$14 million to buy the property as a state park.

Yanke has in the past hinted at the possibility of selling the ranch because of frustration over his inability to log it.

"The fact that we're successfully logging it now makes it all the more valuable," said Worthley, who estimated the value of timber on the ranch at \$24 million.

"The amount of money they've pegged for it is probably on the low side," Worthley said.

But he said the property is divided into 15 parcels and it's possible Yanke would sell part of it for a park.