University land in great demand

Research vs. revenue crunch

By KAREN AHO

It was March when Patricia Holloway, gazng over the uni
versity’s farm fields from the Georgeson Botanical Garden
noticed drilling rigs on her research plots.

As a horticulturist at the Uni
versity of Alaska Fairbanks,
Holloway tests plants’ reactions to arctic conditions. She is one of
the scores of university, govern
ment and private researchers who use the 290-acre Agricultu
ral and Forestry Experiment Station farm for such experi
ments. Holloway’s results are used by gardeners throughout
the Tanana Valley, who are ripe for arctic varieties.

But the drilling rigs were not hers.

“I went to our farm manager to ask what the hell was going on and he said, ‘I don’t know. I just know UA statewide has to do
some test drilling on the proper
erty.’

“I went to the business mana
ger next and asked him and his
answer was, ‘I’m not allowed to
tell you.’

“This is a public institution and they’re not going to tell me

what they’re doing on public land!” said Holloway, reliving five months later the anger she felt.

Two months after her initial inquiry, Holloway learned from an anonymous source in the administration that the drills were conducting recons
truction tests.

Carr & Gottstein Foods Co. Inc.
and Wal-Mart want to build two shopping centers on 26 acres at the southwest corner of the ex
periment station, at Geist Road and the Parks Highway. Wal
Mart would build a 150,000
-square-foot store; Carrs a
75,000-square-foot store, both with room for expansion.

For the businessmen, the site is
ideal. The land has been tilled for more than 40 years. It is flat
and perennially has 120 feet be
low the surface, compared to the
6 to 30 inches in nearby forested land.

The land is a prime commer
cial location and is surrounded by su
permarkets on the northwest side of town, and Transportation Planning calls for a
widened Geist Road thorough
fare.

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Research Fears—Patricia Holloway, a horticulturist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, is concerned that a com
mercial development on UA land could harm university agricultural research. Most of the faculty of the School of Agriculture and Land Management is opposed to the pro
posed development.

RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

USDA-ARS soils scientist who has worked in Fairbanks for eight years.

“The effects of automobiles is a con
cern,” said Cochran. And, “anytime you have a crowd closer to it, you increase the chance of vandalism.”

For the carbon dioxide studies, the sci
ents would build plastic cylinders and pump carbon dioxide into them from the bottom. Plants grown in the cylinders would live in higher levels of carbon dio
xide than plants outside.

The study, the farthest north in a net
work of such studies, is in a high priority with the USDA, say scientists.

By the year 2050, carbon dioxide levels will have doubled from pre-industrial levels, the result of the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation, said Cochran.

But little is known, say scientists, how plants react to those increased levels.

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Shopping centers could ruin C02 research project

Staff report

Commercial development on University of Alaska Fairbanks agricultural land could thwart a $3.5 million federal study of high carbon dioxide levels on plants, scien
tists say.

Scientists with the United States Depart
ment of Agriculture-Agriculture Re
search Service say that the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station farm at UA
Fs the only place in Alaska they have found that is suitable for their project.

The four-to 10-year study would bring more than $3 million in equipment and salaries to the university. At least four uni
versity staff and four students per semes
ter would work on the federal payroll for the project. Hundreds of thousands of dol
ars of USDA-ARS equipment would be shared by the Institute of Northern Fore
stry, the federal Long Term Ecological Re
search program and UAF’s Global

Change Center.

“I think this CO2 site is something that
should be considered of principal impor
tance,” UAF Land Resources Manage
ment department head Carol Lewis told UAF’s Master Planning Committee Friday.

Carrs and Wal-Mart have expressed an interest in building shopping centers on 26 acres of UAF agricultural land near Geist Road and the Parks Highway. The Uni
versity of Alaska Board of Regents will
consider the recommendations of the Mas
ter Planning Committee and decide in September whether to allow the com
panies to lease the land.

The USDA research plots would be located about 300 feet from the shopping cen
ters.

“It puts us marginally close to the inter
section from the wind patterns of the shop
ping centers,” said Verian Cochran, a

Rob Strogren/News-Miner