



Rob Stapleton/News-Miner

**FIELDS OF GRAIN**—University fields between Geist Road and the Parks Highway are a favorite feeding place of waterfowl, including geese and sandhill cranes. In September,

the UA Board of Regents will consider a proposal to lease a 26-acre section to Carrs and Wal-Mart.

## University land in great demand

### Research vs. revenue crunch

By KAREN AHO

Staff Writer

It was March when Patricia Holloway, gazing over the university's farm fields from the Georgeson Botanical Garden, noticed drilling rigs on her research plots.

As a horticulturist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Holloway tests plants' reactions to arctic conditions. She is one of the scores of university, government and private researchers who use the 290-acre Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station farm for such experiments. 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 wants to do some test drilling on the property.'"

"I went to the business manager 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.

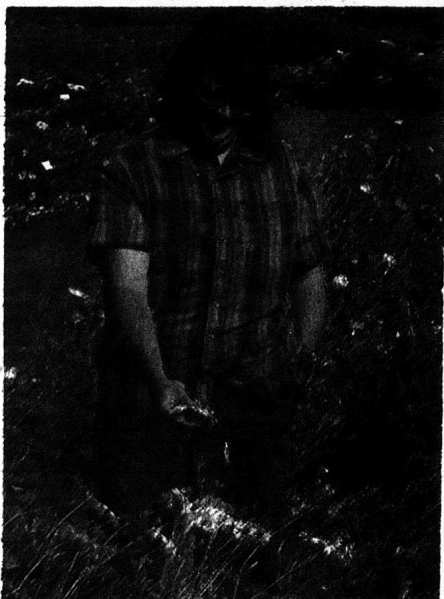
Two months after her initial inquiry, Holloway learned from an anonymous source in the administration that the drills were conducting preconstruction tests.

Carr Gottstein Foods Co. Inc. and Wal-Mart want to build two shopping centers on 26 acres at the southwest corner of the experiment 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 businesses, the site is ideal. The land has been tilled for more than 40 years. It is flat and permafrost lies 120 feet below the surface, compared to the 6 to 30 inches in nearby forested land.

The land is a prime commercial location. There are no supermarkets on the northwest side of town, and Department of Transportation plans call for a widened Geist Road thoroughfare.

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**RESEARCH FEARS**—Patricia Holloway, a horticulturist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, is concerned that a commercial 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 proposed development.

## Shopping centers could ruin C02 research project

Staff report

Commercial development on University of Alaska Fairbanks agricultural land could thwart a \$2.5 million federal study of high carbon dioxide levels on plants, scientists say.

Scientists with the United States Department of Agriculture-Agriculture Research Service say that the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station at UAF is 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 university staff and four students per semester would work on the federal payroll for the project. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of USDA-ARS equipment would be shared by the Institute of Northern Forestry, the federal Long Term Ecology Research program and UAF's Global

Change Center.

"I think this C02 site is something that should be considered of principal importance," UAF Land Resources Management 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 University of Alaska Board of Regents will consider the recommendations of the Master Planning Committee and decide in September whether to allow the companies to lease the land.

The USDA research plots would be located about 200 feet from the shopping centers.

"It puts us marginally close to the interruption from the wind patterns of the shopping centers," said Verlan Cochran, a

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

"The effects of automobiles is a concern," said Cochran. And, "anytime you have a crowd closer to it, you increase the chance of vandalism."

For the carbon dioxide studies, the scientists 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 dioxide than plants outside.

The study, the farthest north in a network of such studies, is 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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