

Oct. 25, 2020

Ms. Sheri Buretta, Chair (via email: sburetta@alaska.edu)
Board of Regents
University of Alaska Fairbanks
19530 Wingham Circle
Eagle River, AK 99577

Re: Matanuska Experiment Farm — Gravel Extraction Project

Dear Board of Regents,

The Alaska Quiet Rights Coalition (AQRC), a non-profit organization, is writing to add its support to the many objections to gravel extraction in the Matanuska Greenbelt on UAF land.

AQRC advocates for responsible use of public lands. While gravel may be considered a natural resource, the Matanuska Greenbelt's greater value for the public is in providing opportunities for natural quiet and recreation, right in the middle of the Palmer-Wasilla area. With the rapid development of these communities, the Greenbelt has become our own Central Park, providing unique and valuable opportunities for quiet recreation close to home. Natural quiet doesn't mean no sound; it implies being able to hear the natural world, whether wind or bird— being able to see and smell and feel the world around oneself. For years, the Greenbelt has provided this experience to hikers, bikers, bird watchers, even cross-country ski and running teams from our local high schools. This is worth so much more than gravel.

There are many places in the borough where people pursue motorized recreation— whether by jet-ski or snowmachine, four wheeler or dirt bike, ORV or airboat —but there are very few places that provide a quiet walk, ski, or bike ride undisturbed by motorized activities, especially in the core area between the Glenn and Palmer-Wasilla Highways. As a crucial part of the Mat-Su Borough's extensive trail system, linking together separate smaller trail systems on either side, the whole system is diminished, if the Greenbelt is removed. Imagine how objectionable an active gravel pit would be in the middle of the trail system, forcing users to detour around dump trucks and dozers. With excavators clattering and front-end loaders beeping loudly in reverse, these activities would be disruptive far beyond the immediate industrial site.

While we appreciate the University's current financial challenges, the Greenbelt's value as a social and ecological resource far exceeds the one-time gains of nonrenewable resource development. The Greenbelt is unique in its location but also in its structure of cooperative agreement amongst various landowners. Ecologically, the area of field and forest presents a complimentary upland habitat to the marsh and lowlands of the nearby Palmer Hay Flats Refuge. We are stewards of the land and as such have responsibility for what it will be like in the future.

Sincerely,

Dan Elliott for the AQRC Board