



## MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

### Office of the Borough Mayor

350 East Dahlia Avenue • Palmer, AK 99645

Phone (907) 861-8682 • Fax (907) 861-8669

[Vern.Halter@matsugov.us](mailto:Vern.Halter@matsugov.us)

August 18, 2020

Ms. Sheri Buretta, Chair (via email: [sburetta@alaska.edu](mailto:sburetta@alaska.edu))

Board of Regents

University of Alaska Fairbanks

19530 Wingham Circle

Eagle River, AK 99577

Re: Matanuska Experiment Farm - Gravel Expansion Project

Dear Board of Regents,

We are seriously concerned about the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) Gravel Expansion Project on the Matanuska Experiment Farm located in Palmer, Alaska.

The Matanuska Experiment Farm is an underutilized asset at the entry point of the Matanuska Valley. It is a key marker for the Matanuska Valley Colony history, with several hundred acres of cultivated land used for growing food, as well as testing vegetables and grain varieties. We understand that a University of Alaska Fairbanks contractor has already begun digging in two areas: an existing gravel pit on the farm, and a 70-acre parcel along the Greenbelt trails. The attached map shows the 70-acre area. Please note, not indicated on the map is an area south of Johnson Lake, that we understand is also being tested for gravel extraction.

The Matanuska Experiment Farm comprises a third of the Matanuska Greenbelt, a 33-mile trail system that, as noted in UAF's 2019 long-range farm plan, provides the "largest uninterrupted public space in the core of the Mat-Su Valley." As noted in UAF's plan: "A report published in 2015 concluded there is a \$5.00 return for every \$1.00 of real estate value for maintaining public open spaces in the Mat-Su Valley and not developing the land into private or commercial facilities." The 70-acre parcel identified for gravel extraction sits at the center of the Greenbelt, and includes a major connecting trail that, if blocked, would create a major disruption to use of the area.

The lack of an opportunity for public engagement on this issue is concerning. The notice to the public and surrounding land owners, including the Borough, was sent late in the afternoon of August 3, less than 24 hours before the excavator began digging test pits on the farm and trail system. This does not seem representative of UAF's values to meaningfully engage stakeholders and the community.

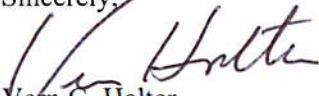
The Mat-Su Borough values the UAF, including the farm and Mat-Su College, as a key neighbor and strategic partner in the area's long-term growth. Our hopes are that the UAF likewise views the Borough as an important stakeholder in its long-term vision. As noted in [UAF's 2019 long-range plan for the farm](#), "Geographically, the farm links UAF to Southcentral Alaska which is projected to have the highest population growth (77%) in Alaska, over the next thirty years."

There is no doubt UAF and the state are facing grave financial times. However, this gravel project has the potential for severe negative consequences that would far outweigh the dollars potentially gained.

We urge UAF to find economic solutions which do not include looking for short-term gain, through gravel extraction of farm land, that would take away valued land use for future generations. We would like to engage in a meeting with you, the many stakeholders, and the public who value this property, to discuss options for using and producing revenue from this important community asset.

Thank you for your partnership and consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

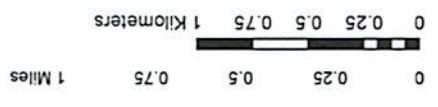
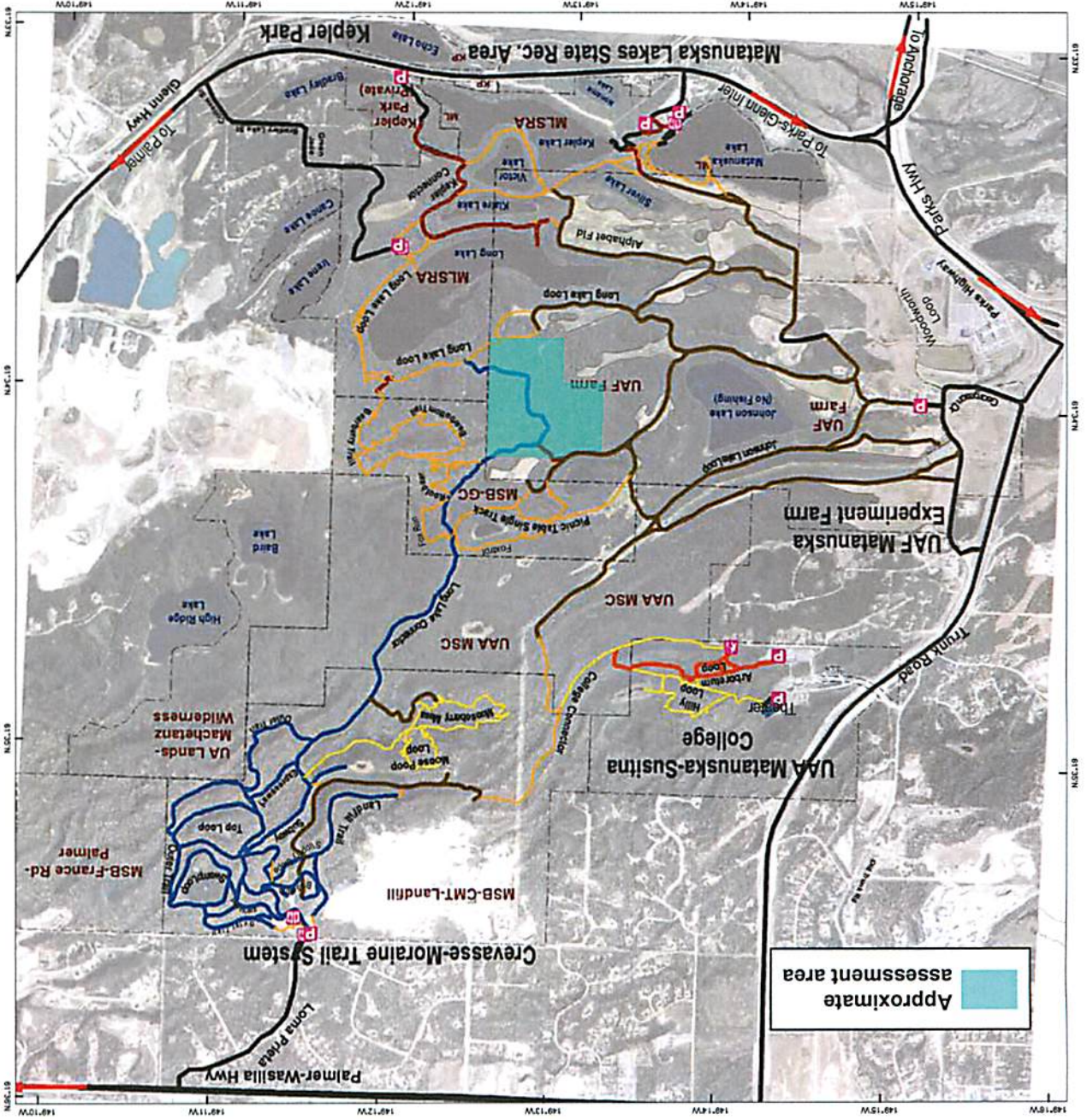
  
Vern G. Halter  
Mayor

  
George W. Hays  
Acting Borough Manager

cc: Assembly  
Senator Shelley Hughes  
Representative DeLena Johnson



# Matanuska Experiment Farm resource assessment project



- Trail types**
- Single track-no horses
  - Single track
  - Wide track-no horses
  - Wide track
  - Groomable ski
  - Dirt roads
  - Hardened-asphalt, gravel
  - Trail Tread

Crevasse-Moraine Trail System (MSB-CMT-Landfill) - Turn south (left coming from Palmer, right coming from Wasilla) on Loma Prieta off Palmer-Wasilla Highway. Managed by Matanuska-Sustina Borough, which also manages Greenbelt Central (MSB-GC). MSB-France Rd-Palmer is presently leased by Palmer, but could be used for trails in future.

Matanuska Lakes State Recreation Area (MLSRA) - Turn north (left coming from Anchorage, right coming from Palmer) off Glenn Highway about 0.5 mi east of Glenn - Parks interchange. Managed by Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

University of Alaska Anchorage Matanuska-Sustina College (UAA-MSC) - Access parking near Glenn Massay Theater or behind Snodgrass Hall. Please respect the privilege of being able to access their non-motorized trails. Horses are not allowed.

University of Alaska Fairbanks Matanuska Experiment Farm (UAF-Farm) - Active research farm. Please respect their fields and on-going research. Please yield to farm equipment and operators. The area is non-motorized for general public. Please respect the privilege of using these areas and stay on trails.

Kepler Park is a private park in southeast corner of Greenbelt that encourages non-motorized access. Please check signs at trailhead for more details on access.

Not for navigation or legal purposes.  
 Google road map: <http://goo.gl/maps/Ra5l>