

# Storm-driven waves and high winds tear at Alaska's coastline

Storm-driven waves and high winds tear at Alaska's coastline, chewing away at shore-side villages. Inland, powerful river currents, seasonally strengthened with huge chunks of ice, erode the mud and gravel banks.

In a few years time—sometimes within a few months, acres of community land fall victim to the greedy waters and disappear.

Traditionally the harassed villagers simply moved inland a bit only to face the problem again as the waters worked their ravages on the land.

Accustomed to living close to the sea and on river banks important to them for subsistence and transportation, the people are loath to abandon familiar sites, bases for their hunting and fishing.

More recently, Native groups have turned to the Corps of Engineers for advice and possible assistance in combating this repetitive problem. In past months, the Corps' Alaska District has responded to seven such requests.

Three came from the coastline communities of Port Heiden, Shismaref and Mekoryuk, and others from the villages of Anvik, Ugashik, Emmonak and Huslia located adjacent to destructive inland streams.

Engineers have visited the villages to examine damages and investigate threatened areas. Their findings have been studied in the District office and consideration given to possible Corps projects that may offer solution to the villagers' problems.

Although Federal projects cannot be recommended, because cost would far exceed the value of benefits, the District has provided recommendations for self-help projects.

Basic structural designs have been drawn by the Corps to help local residents construct their own erosion control devices. The District, in addition, has offered the technical services of its engineers to assist and guide the corrective work when it begins.

A special request for assistance came to the Corps via the State Division of Parks. The historic Dyea Indian Cemetery located on the banks of the Taiya River near Skagway has been severely endangered by erosion.

In the past five years the river has eaten its way some 250 feet toward the graveyard; less than

that distance remains between the bank and the nearest grave. The District has recommended the placement of protective rock groins through joint State and Federal action.

A similar situation regarding erosion at the historic city of Eagle, near the international border on the Yukon River, is being investigated.