

Who Else But?—

Ft. Yukon Dike Builders Consult Area's Expert Dam Engineers

Contractors building a dike to protect Fort Yukon, interior Alaska's largest village, from river bank erosion found that the key to success was to follow the methods of the area's most experienced—

expert dam builder—the beaver.

Erosion caused by two connecting sloughs of the Yukon River has endangered the new school and many homes in Fort Yukon in

recent years.

Several years ago, the U. S. Corps of Engineers tried to stop the erosion by damming the sloughs. They gave up before the dyke was finished.

In 1967, the State Legislature appropriated \$200,000 under a bill sponsored by legislator Don Young, a school teacher from Fort Yukon.

The contract for the dyke was let in July. The successful bidder was a joint venture of Tundra Contractors, Inc., and Jules Wright's Aurora Construction of Fairbanks.

A severe problem facing the contractors was that there was no rock available at Fort Yukon. The available materials—gravel, dirt and trees—would wash away when they were dumped into flowing water.

Comments such as "impossible!"... "the state is crazy!"... "the contractor is nuts!"... "the Yukon cannot be stopped!"... were uttered by the Corps of Engineers and others.

The contractors decided to consult experts on their problem. So they went to the area's age-old expert, the beaver, and studied his

(Continued on page 7)

Dam Engineers

(Continued from page 1)

methods.

They decided to copy the beaver's method of construction. So the dyke would be built of sticks and mud—probably the largest beaver dam in history!

Work on the first slough began in August, and the dike was completed without too much washing. But, when they started to work on the wider and deeper second slough, the water started to rise.

After the wads of sticks and mud began to wash away, the contractors shut down the job until the water level dropped in October.

Then they put one dozer on each side of the slough and gathered huge piles of trees and mud. When they were ready, the piles were shoved into the main channel.

After three washouts, the contractors finally were able to bridge the gap and stop the flow of water through the dike.

The final dam is twice as wide, 650 feet long and three feet higher than the original design, and can boast of having some of the most experienced design engineers of all time—the beavers.