

Corps blasts DOT's dredging record

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Anchorage — The Army Corps of Engineers wants the Alaska Department of Transportation charged for using gravel full of salmon eggs from the Anchor River to repair the Sterling Highway after a flood.

In a letter this week to Gov. Bill Sheffield, Col. Neil E. Saling, district engineer for the Corps, said the agency is fed up with the DOT's disregard for the environment.

Since 1977, the DOT has violated the laws protecting streams and wetlands 14 times, he said. The numerous violations have "left me no alternative but to request that the U.S. Attorney seek legal action against the State of Alaska."

"I'm afraid I can't answer any of the questions concerning this," David Haugen, deputy commissioner in Anchorage said Thursday. "Nobody inside DOT can . . .

because of the threat of a lawsuit."

U.S. Attorney Michael Spaan said he is trying to get the state to pledge that what happened at the Anchor River won't happen again anywhere in Alaska.

"We are talking now," Spaan said. "I don't know if 'scare' them is the right word. We're prepared to litigate if we have to."

Violations of the Clean Water Act are punishable by fines of up to \$10,000 a day.

Most of the violations involve dredging or dumping fill into state streams and wetlands without authorization from the Corps, the federal agency responsible for their protection.

"We have received good cooperation and coordination from the environmental and planning personnel," Saling said. "But those who actually implement projects in the field seem to totally disregard permit requirements."

The summer, the DOT diverted most of Goose Creek into Sheep Creek near Mile 88 on the Parks Highway without Corps' authorization. The Corps says it has complained regularly about such incidents, but has never before tried to take them to court.

Saling said the DOT went too far last month when it sent two bulldozers into the Anchor River, one of the state's premiere fishing streams.

"Approximately 1,000 feet of riverbed, which contained salmon spawning beds full of this year's eggs, was destroyed," Saling said.

The Corps and the Alaska Department of Fish & Game had given the DOT permission to put 2,000 yards of gravel along the highway to return the flooding Anchor to its original channel.

Instead of hauling gravel from a pit, the bulldozers took it from the riverbed. Saling said the result was "significant damage to spawning beds of one of the most popular steelhead and salmon streams in the state. Also, dikes were constructed and the river diverted out of its present channel without authorization."