

Engineers will look at Bethel erosion problem

WASHINGTON, D.C.--The U. S. Senate has agreed to a request from Sen. Ted Stevens and asked the Army Corps of Engineers to study an erosion control project in Bethel, Alaska.

Stevens made the request in the form of an amendment to H.R. 8309, the Navigation Development Act of 1978, currently being debated on the Senate floor. The amendment passed on a voice vote.

"This project is desperately needed to protect the property and lives of the people who live in this growing community in Alaska," Stevens said, explaining that the right bank of the Kuskokwim River in Bethel has been

eroding at an alarming rate and is threatening a U.S. Public Health Service hospital and a fuel oil tank farm.

Bethel is located approximately 80 miles above the mouth of the Kuskokwim River in Southwest Alaska. The population of the greater area is about 8,500 with 3,000 people residing within the city limits.

Stevens said that in 1970, the erosion rate normal to the bank was 12 feet per year, but during the spring runoff period of 1977 the erosion rate accelerated and was estimated at

10 feet per week in the vicinity of the hospital and tank farm.

He said the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has directed the Corps of Engineers to examine the problem and what was needed now is for the U.S. Senate to instruct the Corps to begin the study.

The amendment as passed by the Senate authorizes the Corps to conduct a feasibility study for erosion control improvements on the river at a cost not

to exceed \$400,000. It directs the Corps to report on the study to Congress in two years.

"It is estimated that protection of 10,000 feet of river bank would preserve existing lands, make unnecessary the moving of buildings and oil storage tanks, and protect a vital medical docking facility," Stevens told the Senate when he introduced the amendment.

He said the State of Alaska, City of Bethel and private interests had constructed timber bulkheads along 3,000 feet of the river bank, but the river undermined the bulkhead and most of it collapsed and washed away.

"The people of Bethel have made a commitment to save their town," he said, "the federal government can do no less."