

# State plans dike to stop Noatak erosion

By STAN JONES

Many an Alaskan village lives in a state of nervous truce with its river. With some, such as Aniak, the problem is flooding. In the case of Noatak, which is located about 60 miles northwest of Kotzebue, the problem is not flooding, but erosion.

For years, the Noatak River has been washing away the bank on which the village stands, and today the river is within a few yards of some houses and school buildings. After many months of study and discussion, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is calling for bids on a million dollar project to protect the bank from further erosion.

Plans call for the construction of an earthen dike next to the eroding bank, with a target completion date of April 1981. According to Riley Snell of the DOT&PF's Fairbanks office, the project has acquired emergency status, and his department hopes that work can begin by the first of the year.

Expected to cost about \$1 million, the dike is intended to serve as thermal insulation rather than physical protection. State engineers feel that the erosion is caused by the high ice content of the riverbank, rather than by the river's current. As the ice melts, the bank loosens and caves into the river.

They hope that the insulating dike will inhibit the thawing and thus slow or halt the erosion. Since the dike will have a much lower ice content than the bank itself, they expect it to be less subject to the kind of erosion that is threatening the village.

The engineers do not expect the dike to solve Noatak's problem permanently, however. Snell says it's a holding action, designed to give the state time to come up with plans and money for a long-term solution. He says that studies for a permanent fix should begin early in 1981, that funding will be sought from the next legislature, and that work on it should begin in 1982.

The state actually had previously designed a more elaborate project for construction this winter, but had to scale it down when all bids received exceeded the budget for the project.

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