

NSB wins wetland permit fight

The Associated Press

The Army Corps of Engineers has agreed not to use its new nationwide wetlands regulatory permits in the Arctic, North Slope Borough Mayor Eugene Brower said Friday.

Brower said the borough and the corps reached an out-of-court settlement on the borough's suit filed against the corps after it adopted the new approach. Brower and environmental groups considered the new approach a threat to environmental safeguards on wetland development.

Brower said that under terms of the settlement, the new per-

mits provided for in Section 404 of the Clean Water Act would not apply for activities on the Arctic coastal plain of the North Slope.

"The agreement that we negotiated with the Corps of Engineers fully supports and justifies the basic arguments we've maintained from the start," Brower said. "We told them that their new permits, issued by Washington bureaucrats with little or no knowledge of the Arctic, wouldn't work up here."

The borough suit, filed in January, was part of a broader challenge by environmental groups objecting to regulation

changes in the Clean Water Act.

The lawsuit targeted changes that would allow the corps to issue blanket wetlands permits, and it asserted that the new regulations totally eliminated the standard permit review process for oil and gas activities on wetlands.

In effect, Brower said, the changes would have permitted development on about 70 percent of the wetlands on the North Slope without the borough, state or federal agencies given an opportunity to review any applications or request any specific environmental safeguards.