



photo courtesy of Northwind Industries Ltd.

Northwind Industries employee Roger Allen stands by a plow near an ice road on McKinley Bay. The company, which has been building winter roads for oil and gas exploration companies since 1997, recently built a route from Tuktoyaktuk to send supplies to the Kulluk offshore drilling rig.

Roads of ice to prosperity

Inuvik company has been building for the oil and gas industry for a decade

by David Ryan
Northern News Services
Inuvik

While oil and gas exploration is a huge business in the North, the first thing exploration companies need to do is get to their property.

That's something ice road builder Northwind Industries has been helping with since 1997.

The company began with one truck and has grown rapidly, said owner and president Kurt Wainman.

Each job is different, but Wainman said his company has the know-how and experience to deal with each task effectively.

"It's a challenging atmosphere but we look forward to it," he said.

Northwind has built ice roads for oil and gas companies such as Chevron, Shell, and Petro Canada, along with a number of exploration companies.

Building an ice road in the Delta normally starts in mid-November, said operations manager Fred Bailey.

Workers use snowmobiles and sleds to begin profiling ice thickness by using a ground penetrating radar, he said.

The ice's thickness is plotted on a global positioning system. Mid-sized trucks are then used to plow the ice road before larger plows are brought in to maintain on the route, he said.

Some sections of the ice road may need to be flooded depending on how thick the ice is, he said, adding it can be 30-50 cm.

Hiring Northerners a priority

Northwind Industries is a company that strives to employ Northern workers first, said Wainman.

"Our hiring circle starts here in Inuvik."

The company employs up to 40 workers at peak operations, though more than 75 different employees have worked at Northwind in the last year, said Wainman.

While ice road construction for oil and gas companies still makes up the largest portion of its business, the company has diversified in the last number of years. With 25 semi-trucks, 15 smaller vehicles and a variety of other machinery, Northwind now does summer road construction and gravel work.

It's ice profiling work has expanded into the Sahtu region and the company also does logistics work in Alberta and B.C.



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