

Reindeer, Line Experiment Successful

A group of cooperating state and federal agencies have just completed their fifth successful test of reindeer encounter with an artificial pipeline structure in the Penny River Valley near Nome.

Begun in November 1971, the pipeline project is a joint venture of the Bureau of Land Management, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, the Alaska Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Northwest Herdsman Association.

"The objective of the project," says James Hemming of the BLM's Pipeline Division, "is to study the responses of reindeer to a pipeline structure."

It is similar to a project conducted on the North Slope with caribou except that this project allows year-round observation of the herds whereas the North Slope study was limited to summer observation.

In the May test, a portion of the BIA model herd was moved into the pipeline area from a calving location about three miles away by herdsman Chris Jones and Johnson Stalker.

The biologists and cameramen positioned themselves on a mountain overlooking the pipeline to observe the herds' unguided movements for two consecutive days, Hemming says.

This particular test was concerned with the movement of cows and calves which had be-

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come separated from the herd and their attempts to rejoin the herd.

The artificial line is 8,500 feet long including a gravel ramp at one end.

A 400-foot section is elevated 12 feet above the ground and there are wing fences extending from each end which generally serve to lead the reindeer toward the pipeline.

Hemming says the agencies have tested different size groups of up to 500 deer at various seasons of the year.

There will be two more testing periods in late June and September before the project is completed, and there are also tentative plans to have a student observer in the area for the month of July.

"Filming is a significant part of the testing," says Hemming. "The films allow us to check our recorded observations and quite frequently, we notice movements we did not see during the test period."

The films will be edited under the direction of Dr. Peter Lent of the University of Alaska's Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, which will tabulate the results of the test as well.