

Wolf hunting saves young moose population

Moose calf survival has dramatically improved in Game Management Unit 20A near Fairbanks where last winter state game biologists and local trappers reduced the wolf population by more than 50 percent, a Department of Fish and Game official said this week.

"We have observed what appears to be threefold increase in moose calf survival between fall 1975 and fall 1976," said Fairbanks Game Management Coordinator Oliver Burris. "The results are encouraging. There may be a cause and effect relationship between last winter's wolf reduction program and this

year's increase in calf survival, but I think it's a little early to say for sure."

Burris cautioned that department biologists consider the most recent counts somewhat less reliable than the 1975 counts because of the smaller sample size and poor snow conditions. He said that even if there had been an adequate sample he would be hesitant to conclude on the basis of one year's data that shooting and trapping wolves in that area was entirely responsible for the increase in calf survival.

In terms of actual numbers, he said department biologists

this past fall counted 42 calves per 100 cows overall on several standard count areas. More extensive counts in the fall of 1975 yielded only 14 calves per 100 cows. However, one of the count areas had high calf ratios in 1975. The 1975 sample was roughly twice as large, the difference Burris said being due to poor snow conditions that made counting so difficult that it was not practical to survey in several count areas in 1976.

Burris pointed out that observations by independent observers and other department biologists support the statistics. He said several individuals who

spend a large part of their time in that area have reported much improved calf survival during the summer and fall of 1976.

Fish and Game biologists last winter shot 66 wolves in Unit 20A and a small adjacent area to the west. Trapping accounted for about 70 additional wolves, leaving 60 to 89 wolves in the control area in last spring, state biologists estimate.

The department plans to resume taking wolves in that area this spring as weather conditions permit. State biologists say it will be necessary to keep the wolf population in that area low for a number of years

until the desired increase in the moose population can be attained.