

Oklahoma University Studies Caribou in N. Slope

The University of Okla. in cooperation with the United States Army and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, is again working with caribou on the north slope of the Alaska Range between Delta Junction and Healy.

"This is part of a disease incidence and transmittal study," said Mel Buchholtz, leader of the group.

"Caribou are pursued with a helicopter, and darts containing a drug are fired from a CO₂ powered gun at close range. The caribou is immobilized shortly after the drug enters the bloodstream and the crew quickly extracts a blood sample, places a numbered metal tag in each ear and an orange plastic ear streamer in one ear.

"The drug soon wears off and the animal is on its way," said Buchholtz.

"A total of 160 caribou have been tagged in the last two years. We hope to be able to immobilize about 80 this spring," said Buchholtz.

The University of Okla. team is new this spring so Oliver (Bud) Burris, game biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, is accompanying the crew until they become familiar with the immobilization techniques.

"The Department of Fish

and Game will analyze one half of all the blood samples, observe movements of ear-marked caribou from the air and obtain material to help our caribou age determination techniques," said Burris.

Sportsmen are asked to

bring the entire head or the ears and jaw of ear-tagged caribou they shoot and to report sightings of ear-marked caribou to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

The caribou season ends March 31.