

More Moose Calves

Department of Fish and Game moose surveyors recently recorded near record moose calf survival in Game Management Unit 20A and a department spokesman attributes the success to a mild winter and low "predator density."

Department moose research biologist Dr. William Gasaway said 38 calves per 100 cows survived this past winter, a figure surpassed only in 1961 when 49 calves per 100 cows came through the winter. The number of calves per 100 cows is an index commonly used by Fish and Game to express survival of calves over winter.

Gasaway said the two factors that were probably most important in the high counts were a mild winter and a low predator density on the Tanana Flats during calving. The Tanana Flats make up a large portion of Unit 20A.

"The greatest loss of moose calves to predators in Unit 20A occurs during the summer," he said. "If they can make it through that period, they appear them to be less susceptible to predation, at least during mild winters."

State biologists last winter took 27 wolves in Unit 20A and an adjacent part of 20C as part of an ongoing wolf reduction program, and department records indicate trappers took an additional 24 wolves for a total of 51. In the winter of 1975-76 department personnel and trappers took 135 wolves. Department biologists believe there are now about 40 to 50 wolves remaining in the area.

"It looks as if we are approaching the ratio of wolves and moose that will allow the moose population to increase at a reasonable rate, at least during as mild as winters as this past one," Gasaway said.

In recent years, moose calf survival has been relatively poor because of severe winters and probably predation, biologists say. The early 1970's have generally seen some of the poorest survival recorded.

Last winter Fish and Game reported a threefold increase in calf survival in 20A from late fall 1976 over the previous fall. Gasaway said the most recent figures corroborate the earlier figures and pointed to a low loss of calves from late fall to early summer.