

Wolves Down, Moose Up At Isle Royale NP

From the Midwest Region comes word that the number of wolves on Isle Royale NP is down slightly this year, but the island's moose population continues to increase gradually.

Rolf Peterson, Michigan Tech University biologist now under contract to the NPS, completed his annual winter wolf-moose population survey in the park, and reported that six of the 22 wolves there last year have died or disappeared. These losses, however, have been partially offset by the survival of four pups born last summer, bringing the total population to 20. Fate of most of the wolves lost from last year's population is not known, but at least one of the six was a victim of interpack warfare.

"We know that one member of the Harvey Lake Pack, which occupied the middle portion of the island, was killed by the East Pack when it invaded the Harvey Lake territory," said Peterson. "We came upon the East Pack just after they had killed the Harvey Lake wolf and had begun scent-marking their new territory."

An Alpha (dominant) female of the Harvey Lake Pack had been killed two years ago, reducing the pack's numbers to three. With this year's death, the two remaining members have dispersed and the group is no longer functional as a pack. As a result, the West Pack, numbering 11 animals, now controls two-thirds of the island, while the five-member North-east Pack controls the remaining third." Peterson said the West Pack raised three new pups this year, while the East Pack added one.

According to Peterson Isle Royale's wolves are having a difficult time finding weak or sick moose to kill because the moose herd is in relatively good condition. He expects this situation to prevail until the end of this decade when many members of the herd will reach an age when their weakened condition will make them more susceptible to wolf predation.

While conditions for wolf survival are less than optimal, Isle Royale's moose population has continued to increase gradually to 1,025.