

✓ More foraging deer 10-25-84 RP dying on 17 this year

SANTA CRUZ (UPI) — The death rate for hungry deer crossing Highway 17 in the Santa Cruz Mountains has risen dramatically and experts attribute the problem to last year's forest fire.

The deer cross the highway in search of such plants as manzanita and oak because the huge 1985 fire above the Lexington Reservoir cleared about 13,800 acres of grass, trees and brush.

In October of this year alone, 17 dead deer have been removed from the highway, according to the State Department of Transportation. Between 10 and 15 deer are killed in the same area, under normal conditions, each year.

"The animals are moving because of a reduced amount of foliage available as a result of that fire," said Bruce Elliot, a district wildlife supervisor for the state Department of Fish

and Game.

Many of the dead animals are fawns and does.

Elliot said the problem is enhanced by the current mating season, which propels much of the deer population from September to November.

An estimated 4,000 to 8,000 blacktail deer inhabit the Santa Cruz Mountains, including parts of Santa Clara, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties.