

MITAG-CFO

24 SEPTEMBER 1996

Mr. Charles M. Wooley
Field Supervisor
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
2651 Coolidge
East Lansing, MI 48823

Dear Mr. Wooley,

The following information is presented as a biological assessment of two actions proposed by the Michigan Department of Military Affairs. Formal consultation, biological opinions and incidental takes are requested on the proposal to amend the "Kirtland's Warbler Habitat Management Plan for the Range 30 Complex", and on the new plan for the "West Camp" area.

PROPOSAL #1 - Ammendment for the Stephan Bridge Burn Area

Background

In an effort to find ways to support the recovery of the Kirtland's warbler while maintaining necessary training opportunities at Camp Grayling, the Michigan Department of Military Affairs proposes an amendment to the "KW Habitat Management Plan for the Range 30 Complex". The plan, a cooperative agreement between the Michigan Department of Natural Resources(DNR) and the Michigan Department of Military Affairs(DMA), was signed and adopted on May 22, 1986. One of "The main long-term objectives" of the plan is that "The Military will discourage new regeneration of jack pine where there is potential for warbler use on all lands inside the Tank Range west of Bald Hill Road. This will permit unrestricted Military use of this area in the future." (A copy of the plan is enclosed)

In 1990, a Non-Jeopardy Biological Opinion was issued that supported the plan and expanded on the principle of managing military land to avoid the development of Kirtland's warbler habitat. This Opinion stated that this principle could be applied to all DMA lands not incorporated into designated Kirtland's warbler Management Units. An Incidental Take statement was also issued to allow continued military use of 300 acres of existing habitat in the Range 30 tank range. For a more complete history of Kirtland's warbler management considerations at Camp Grayling, again please see enclosed plan.

The Stephan Bridge Fire of 1990 which started off of the installation, burned approximately 1,500 acres within Camp Grayling boundaries, 1,500 of which are lands not designated as Kirtland warbler Management Areas. This area is in the Range 30 complex(See attached map). Portions of this burn area could regenerate to suitable Kirtland's warbler habitat in the next 2 to 5 years. This is an area of the installation that gets relatively little use due to its proximity to private land and its distance from firing points and activity centers.

This area, along with the rest of the Camp, was inventoried in 1992 and 93 by Michigan Natural Features Inventory for threatened and endangered species. One State Threatened Plant was found in, and adjacent to the area - *Festuca scabrella* (Rough fescue). No federally listed species were found. No Federally designated or proposed critical habitat occurs within or in the vicinity of the burn.

Proposed Amendment

This proposed amendment would make an exception to this policy of discouraging habitat, for Camp Grayling lands burned by the Stephan Bridge fire of 1990, that are not part of the permanent Kirtland's warbler Management Area. Rather than discourage this potential habitat as prescribed in the plan, DMA proposes to allow habitat to develop in the burn area with the option to continue current, unrestricted training, unless or until warblers are found. Occupied areas would then be made off-limits to training during the period May 1 to August 15 in consideration of the previous year's census. Camp Grayling would restrict use of these areas to existing roads and trails by distinctly identifying these areas on training maps and in pre-camp environmental briefings. These areas would not be closed under DNR Directors orders or posted by DNR. The reason for this provision is that, in the past, areas posted under closure orders have discouraged troops from coming to Camp Grayling due to the possibility of accidental entry and corresponding penalties. Censusing, cowbird trapping and other authorized Kirtland's activities would be allowed as long as they are coordinated with Camp Grayling.

Analysis of Affects and Alternatives

The existing Habitat Management Plan and Biological Opinion allows the Military to prevent the regeneration of Kirtland's warbler habitat on all Camp Grayling lands not designated for KW management. Any analysis of affect must be done in comparison to this alternative, keeping in mind that nesting habitat appears to be the most limiting factor in KW recovery.

The positive affect of this proposal for the Stephan Bridge Burn, would be the potential regeneration of from 500 to 1,000 acres of additional Kirtland's warbler habitat, (Based on observations made from roads in and around the area). This habitat would be supplemental to any acreage goals considered in the Kirtland's warbler Recovery Plan and could create nesting areas for up to 20 pairs of warblers. The relatively large contiguous block of habitat could result in a long duration of use.

Negative affects could include lowered pairing, nesting and fledging success for this area due to disturbance of adult and young warblers by adjacent road travel. Deaths of nestlings or fledglings could occur as a result of starvation induced by excessive disturbance. The potential for these impacts would be the same as under Director's Closure Order since travel is still

allowed on existing roads and trails. There is a possibility that these same affects could occur from disturbance by the general public who would otherwise not enter the area if it were posted. The possibility and extent of these impacts would be relatively small for the following reasons:

1. Public use of the area is relatively light due to the proximity of private land and the fact that it is used by the military.
2. Beginning in 1997 the area will be closed to the public and military during summer operation of the adjacent Multipurpose Range Complex, for safety reasons.

In comparison to following the existing plan, a net negative affect could only occur if military activity resulted in physical taking or reduced nesting success of birds drawn to the area from safer, restricted habitats. The number of these takings would also have to be greater than the number of successful pairs that would not have found suitable habitat otherwise. According to DNR Wildlife Biologists, the Kirtland's warbler population appears to be growing fast enough to produce birds to fill most suitable habitat and is projected to outgrow available habitat in the next several years.

In conclusion, DMA, after consultation with DNR and the support of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team, believes that implementation of the proposed amendment to the Kirtland's Warbler Habitat Management Plan for the Range 30 Complex will have a net positive affect on the continued existence of the Kirtland's warbler though it could result in the take of individuals. Because it is difficult to determine exactly how much of the burn will become suitable habitat or how many birds it will support, DMA requests authorization to take (i.e. disturb occupied habitat) up to 1,000 acres of occupied KW habitat.

PROPOSAL #2 - West Camp Burn Plan

Background

This area, burned in 1988, is approximately 600 acres, and is located in Kankaska County, T.26N.-R.5W., Sections 31 & 32. The primary military use of this area is for TOW Missile tracking training. This involves a pickup truck or HUMVEE driving the existing roads and trails with a target, while units fire at them with laser practice weapons. The area is also used occasionally by infantry. In 1994 parts of this site were cut with a hydro-axe to discourage jack pine regeneration and Kirtland's warbler habitat under the authority of the 1990 Biological Opinion. The entire area was not cut due to cost constraints. This spring's census found at least 4 males in the uncut sections. No other federally listed species has been found in this area. No federally designated or proposed critical habitat exists within or in the vicinity of this area.

Proposed Plan

At the suggestion of DNR wildlife biologists, this ammendment would require DMA to restrict military use of this recently occupied area, through briefings, maps and training area assignment, to existing roads and trails without a DNR director's closure order or posting. Censusing, cowbird trapping and other authorized KW activities would be allowed under coordination with Camp Grayling.

Analysis of Affects and Alternatives

In comparison to the alternative of closing and posting the area, this proposal could also result in possible entry by the public with the same affects stated for the Stephan Bridge area. The probability and extent of both military and public impacts are minimal in this area because only existing roads and trails are typically used for military training, and because of its location, the area gets relatively little public recreational use.

Because this area is now occupied by Kirtland's warblers, the only reasonable alternative to this proposal is the historical practice of closing and posting the area, by order of the DNR Director. This strategy does not guarantee compliance or eliminate the chance of accidental entry or take, but it can discourage military units from coming to Camp Grayling.

DMA believes that this management proposal will have no negative affect on the Kirtland's warbler population, though accidental takes could occur. Because it is difficult to anticipate how much of the area will become suitable habitat and occupied, DMA requests authorization to take (i.e. disturb occupied habitat) up to 600 acres of occupied KW habitat. DMA hopes that if this new management proposal is successful it will reduce the need to discourage habitat regeneration on other parts of the camp.

Should more information or clarification be needed please contact me at (517) 483-5646.

Sincerely,

Greg Huntington
DMA Environmental Manager

Enc: Range 30 Mgmt. Plan
Maps