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Militarists Plan to Lure Birds From Grayling Kirtland's Warblers Are

By JERRY MOSKAL
Capitol Bureau

Military strategists are drawing up a battle plan to lure the federally-protected Kirtland's warblers off a favorite National Guard tank range at Camp Grayling in northern Michigan.

But, guard commanders may have to wait a few years before the tiny birds relocate their nesting habitat from the range at Camp Grayling to a nearby state forest.

MEANWHILE, GUARD and Army reserve units from Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Missouri will have to restrict maneuvers around a six-square mile area in the center of the 30,000-acre range.

The problem became so sticky that Indiana's National Guard hinted it might take its 8,000-man force that uses Camp Grayling each August elsewhere, perhaps Camp McCoy in Wisconsin.

After negotiations, Indiana said it would be back next summer. The problem was eased after the Michigan Department of Natural Resources reduced the area restricted to tanks by 1,000 acres.

"THE PRESENT planning calls for us to be there," said Maj. Gen. Alfred Ahner, adjutant general of Indiana. "It's anticipated we'll be at Grayling barring any unforeseen circumstances."

After the additional 1,000 acres were opened up for use, he said Indiana's armored units encountered no major problems during maneuvers the first two weeks of last August.

While other Midwest states were not pleased by the restrictions to protect the endangered Kirtland's warblers, they decided they could live with them.

THE WARBLERS, smaller than a sparrow, are a rare song bird that whistles a curious four-note tune. They winter in the Bahamas and only nest in three Michigan counties around Camp Grayling in the summer.

Their numbers fell from 1,000 in 1961 to 334 last year. The population increased by about two dozen this year. They are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The Michigan National Guard, working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, had been trying to find a

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Guard Strategists' Target

solution to the problem.

WHILE THE situation has been with the guard for a number of years, it was accentuated this year when the early spring to July 15 restriction period was extended by a month when it was discovered the warblers may have a second nesting season.

"Somewhere along the line," said Brig. Gen. Floyd W. Radike of the Michigan National Guard, "we hope there will be an end to the problem.

"Everybody has been a little bit unhappy that this rather large area right in the middle of the tank range was restricted."

THE KIRTLAND'S warblers nest in areas of jackpine that are seven to 15 years old, moving on to another jackpine area in that age bracket when their old habitat becomes unusable.

Guard strategy, Radike says, is to contain the nesting area by eliminating and controlling jackpine that takes over after a fire on the remaining unrestricted tank range land.

At the same time, the Michigan Department of Natu-

ral Resources will develop potential jackpine habitat for the Kirtland's warblers in an adjacent state forest and in another area further south.

RADIKE AND natural resources officials are scheduled to make an inspection tour of the Grayling tank range today after which the final strategy will be drafted.

"We're not too much farther ahead than we were before," Radike said. "One of our immediate concerns is that they don't expand to other ranges.

"I imagine it will be a number of years before they are totally out of there. We realize they (other state guard units) have a problem and they realize we have a problem."

EVENTUALLY, HE said the warblers will move to the new state forest jackpine habitat when their current one on the range becomes too old.

He said about half of the state's population of Kirtland's warblers nest on the tank range. The tank range is one of three areas that make up the 130,000-acre Camp Grayling military reservation, which is used for training by 30,000 men from the five states.