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Kirtland's Warbler planning fly

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Kirtland's Warbler, the cause of numerous forest fires and victor in a battle with the National Guard, takes on the House of Representatives this week.

In a manner of speaking.

THE BATTLE this time is with the robin on its roost as state bird. The tiny, rare warbler drew nationwide attention last summer when the Michigan National Guard was forced to close part of its Camp

Grayling gunnery range when the bird began nesting there.

The forest fires actually are started on behalf of the warbler by conservation officers to help create new, brushy jackpine growth of the type the bird likes. It nests only in Michigan.

Reps. Thomas Holcomb, D-Lansing, and Ralph Ostling, R-Roscommon, think the bird is a far more distinctive feathered trademark than the robin, which has also been adopted by Connecticut and Wisconsin.

HOLCOMB SAID the idea actually originated with a class project at Atwood elementary School in Lansing, prompting to introduce a resolution last spring.

The warbler got a lot of publicity during the past year — it was pictured on post patches and decals used to raise \$17,000 toward a fund to aid endangered wildlife plants.

Conservation officials said about 100 warblers took off for the winter trip to the Bahamas, with between 300 and 400 expected to return next spring — a high mortality rate that puzzles biologists.

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HOLCOMB SAYS his resolution hasn't received 100 per cent encouragement from fellow legislators.

Rep. Dominic Jacobetti, D-Negaunee, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, gave him a "tongue lashing" over his effort, he said. Jacobetti said people of the state are comfortable with the long standing tradition of the robin as a state bird, first designated in 1931.

The vote on the resolution has been delayed a number of days so Holcomb and Ostling could explain their views to fellow

legislators.

"IT'S SOMETHING unique with the state, and I think that's the sort of thing we ought to emphasize," he said.

If approved by the House, and the Senate, the change would be effective Jan. 1, 1977. That means that the state's first two-year highway map, recently unveiled, would be out of date during the second half of its "term." The robin, along with the apple blossom and other state symbols, is incorporated in the map's design.