

# Time Out!

## Mainville - Outdoors



### Kirtland's warblers need help to survive

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Michigan's endangered Kirtland's warblers are in trouble and need help from all outdoorsmen to provide pressure on Congress, the Legislature and the governor for appropriations and give their own dollars to obtain matching federal funds to buy trees for the birds.

Trouble isn't new to the tiny jack pine warblers, whose entire population nests in the so-called Grayling sands stretching from Kalkaska to Alcona and Oscoda counties and weighs an estimated 12 pounds. The population dropped from 502 singing males in 1961 — an estimated 1,004 birds — to 201 in 1971. But, in spite of efforts being made to save the birds from extinction, time is against them.

AS DR. SYLVIA TAYLOR, endangered species coordinator, and John Lerg, her assistant, explain, Kirtland's nest only in jack pines 8-to-18 feet tall — 10-to-20-year-old trees. And, while they have enough to maintain their numbers now, within 10 years they will have less than half as much. No one knows the threshold of extinction of the species — 50, 100 or even 200 pairs.

While the state-federal Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team headed by John Byelich, retired Wildlife Division biologist, has a 135,000-acre area — 78,000 state, 55,000 federal and the balance military — reserved for Kirtland's management, as Dr. Henry Webster, Forest Management Division chief, points out, it is the poorest land in the state and difficult to regenerate.

"There are 11,017 state forest acres of target-age jack pines available to the current 200 pairs, not all good habitat, Taylor explains. "However, by 1984 the total will be only 10,474 — it will be starting to slip — and, by 1989 we will have only 4,618 acres. We haven't figured in the federal and military."

WHILE KIRTLAND'S are also known as "The Bird of Fire" because wildfires open jack pine cones and prepare the light, drought-stricken soil to germinate the seed, this is a period of intense fire control — many of the former deer camps are now permanent or second homes and the forest is alive with people. Jack pine fires are very dangerous because they crown easily and move quickly. And, while prescribed burns have been successful in regenerating jack pine, they seem to lack something — perhaps moisture from the thunderstorm which accompanies the lightning which often ignites a wildfire.

However, with jack pine which couldn't be given away 10 years ago going for \$25 a cord on the stump because of the nationwide short-

than the best jack pine are being selectively regenerated.

Planting jack pine leaves much to be desired — the biologists would prefer the opposing waves pattern designed by Byelich, which provides close nesting areas and little openings between the rows as the waves move away from each other. Foresters, in contrast, prefer the 6-by-7-foot spacing which allows 1,000 trees to be planted in each acre.

DR. WAYNE TODY, deputy director, has suggested a compromise both Wildlife and Forest Management may be able to accept — standard planting with thickets of jack pines to provide the 4-by-4-foot spacing of good nesting habitat.

Thus the potential conflict between foresters and biologists seems resolved. Forest Management has treated over 1,000 acres with "prescribed burns" — about one-half the annual requirement — and borne a lot of the costs such as training a highly-respected fire team formerly headed by Don Grant and now headed by Jerry Grieve, Taylor explains. But the problem is that both the Federal Endangered Species Act and state General Fund budgets have been cut.

Another problem is that plantings have to be anticipated two years in advance to have the seedlings available.

BUT GROWING TREES is precarious in an old nursery operating near capacity. And getting trees started in the jack pine barrens isn't easy — tube planting may prove to be the most effective although Taylor says the program can only survive with natural regeneration — raising trees and planting them on this much acreage is too costly.

And it has taken time to develop a plan of cutting, burning and reforestation extending through the year 2018 — Mike Mang, Mio district forest planner has spent two years developing a 50-year rotation which will assure that there will always be 35,000 acres in the useable habitat stage for a target 1,000 pairs.

But Forest Management can't devote all of its forest cultivation funds to cutting, burning and planting for Kirtland's warblers without violating the spirit of its appropriation. Its budget for prescribed burning and forest fire control has been cut \$187,000 and it is losing \$385,000 in federal funds.

THE DNR LIVING RESOURCES Program offers birders and other outdoorsmen a means of donating funds which, when Congress approves a proposed \$2 million supplemental appropriation, means every \$2 will do \$8 in work.

Taylor estimates there is space for 2 million trees a year on state forest lands. Buying a tree for a Kirtland's costs only 2 cents plus 4 1