

DNR, military act on behalf of warbler

¹²⁷ GRAYLING — Protection of the Kirtland's Warbler, known to nest only in jack pine forests of central Michigan, took a step forward in May as the Department of Natural Resources and Military Affairs signed a cooperative agreement.

The plan will set aside approximately 4,000 acres of land on military-owned property for the birds' protection. This acreage supports the 8- to 18-year-old jack pine stands which the birds need for nesting.

In addition, Military Affairs agrees to a plan to restrict its maneuvers on currently occupied warbler nesting ground until the birds leave the older jack pine stands.

The agreement is the first step toward resolving the differences that have existed on the 40,000-acre tank maneuver range between bird managers and the military.

The program will supplement the long standing agreement between the military and the U.S. Forest Service. That program involves a long-term planting program of jack pine stands which are needed to support the population.

The 1985 census counted 216 singing males. Biologists predict there is one female for each singing male, and the breeding population of the birds is 432. The annual count of males in the state has averaged 207 birds in the last eight annual population surveys.



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Guard tanks will give warblers chance to nest

By KIM MITCHELL ¹²⁷
Times Writer

GRAYLING — National Guard tanks will take aim at different areas for the next two years to allow Kirtland's Warblers a chance to nest.

Under an agreement reached Thursday between the state Department of Military Affairs and the state Department of Natural Resources, the guard will keep tanks out of a 4,000 acre parcel where the song birds are nesting.

Guard officials say tank practice will continue on the remainder of the 40,000 acre tank range.

By the end of the two years, DNR biologists estimate, the warblers will have moved to another area where young jack pines are growing. The birds nest only in young jack pine.

Camp Grayling can then continue with

Michigan is the only state where warblers, an endangered bird, live and 25 percent of the 432 birds in the state live on Camp Grayling property, said Jackie Borden, a DNR official.

But the birds' favorite nesting spot is an area "vital to the military operation of the camp," Borden added.

Thursday's agreement will not only benefit the warbler population, but it will eliminate conflict between the DNR and Michigan National Guard at Camp Grayling, who in recent years have argued over the use of the site.

Borden said the DNR may cut down the older jack pines and plant younger ones elsewhere to create a safer and more suitable environment for the birds.

Meanwhile, signs will be posted near the birds' current nesting spot, she said.

A 1985 survey indicates there are 216 female and 216 male Kirtland Warblers

Military, DNR Sign Land Management Plan To Help Rare Songbird

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The rare songbird, the Kirtland's warbler, will benefit from a land management agreement signed last Thursday by the acting DNR director Gordon Guyer and Department of Military Affairs Director General Vernon Andrews at the Grayling Holiday Inn.

"Basically, the agreement lets the DNR manage military land near Bald Hill Road for the birds while warbler use of land within the Range 30 tank range is discouraged," said Ray Perez, DNR biologist who prepared the land use plan with Greg Huntington, Dept. of Military Affairs Environmental Coordinator.

"This should be good for both sides," said Perez. "Eventually the military will have unrestricted use of their tank range and the birds will have good habitat on military land outside of the tank range."

There are two long-term objectives of the plan:

- 1) The military will discourage growth of new jack pine stands inside the tank range west of Bald Hill Road.
- 2) On some military lands east of Bald Hill Road, Kirtland's warbler management areas will be established.

Existing warbler nesting areas in the tank range will continue to be protected until they grow out of prime warbler habitat. Warblers prefer young jack pine stands.

An area of jack pines just growing into

prime warbler habitat will be allowed to develop near Kyle Lake. If warblers begin to use the area, the military will be advised, but the area will not be posted and closed unless the total warbler population is below 200.

An area of the 1975 Bald Hill burn will have a strip surrounding it cleared to provide a highly visible boundary for tanks and other military vehicles.

The plan also allows for cowbird trapping in active nesting areas on military land.

Since the early 1970's, the DNR has had to close some military lands to protect the warblers. Since warbler nesting occurs during the peak season for military exercises, the restrictions on the tank ranges and other lands have hampered military operations.

The birds have continued to nest in the tank ranges because fires caused from military shooting keep producing young jack pine stands.

Military maneuvers and nesting areas have not been compatible. Tanks and other military vehicles have destroyed nesting habitat or disturbed birds during the nesting season. Low-level flights by jets and helicopters landing in the nesting areas have also disturbed birds. A few times fires have destroyed habitat during nesting season.

The new land management plan is designed to prevent future conflicts between the military and birds.



WARBLER AGREEMENT — Acting DNR director Gordon Guyer, left, and General Andrews, director of the Dept. of Military Affairs, sign an agreement that will help the Kirtland's warbler and the military.

