

Collectors help pine cone reseedling effort

By Don Ingle

BALDWIN — Lee Osterland juggled another bushel of jack pine cones into the Department of Natural Resources storage area for later shipment to the state nursery.

Collectors are turning in the cones in a unique harvest.

"We pay \$20 a bushel for unopened jack pine cones, and it is our main source of seed for forest reseeding or for seedlings in our state forest areas," said Osterland, a DNR forest officer.

Lake County is a prime source for jack pine seed, Osterland said. "The

county has (genetically) superior jack pines and the cones from these stands are especially good for our purposes."

The jack pine cones hold their seed in a tight compact cone. It takes heat to make the cones open to release the seed, and often fires result in good reseedling for jack pine. The Mack Lake Fire, the Fletcher Burn, and the more recent Stephan Bridge Fire east of Grayling burned large areas of jack pine.

"The result was a thick new growth of the native pine in the first two fire areas, and signs that a similar re-growth will occur at the Stephan site. "But nature doesn't always do

things right and we have to give her a hand," Osterland said. "So we need a supply of jack pine cones for our nursery efforts. Usually we reseed or plant seedlings following timber sales, or to supplement stocking where natural restocking was not sufficient."

Jack pines are sometimes called a "weed tree" but are in fact a valued timber type, needed for both wildlife and for commercial uses.

The endangered Kirtland's warbler will nest only in jack pine stands and much of the state's restocking efforts go toward maintaining jack pine habitat for the small bird.

"We pay \$20 a bushel for good,

solid cones. But collectors need to know their pines," Osterland said.

Collectors may take the cones from standing trees of downed trees but the cones should not be open. Cones that are very gray and bleached are usually several years old and may not be viable so care to collect fresh cones should be used. Collectors may turn in their jack pine cones at any district DNR office to collect the fees paid for the cones.

"It's one harvest season many may not be aware of, but an important one for our forest management efforts," Osterland said.

■ Don Ingle is a freelance writer.