

# Area should use endangered bird as tourist draw

Oscoda County should try to capitalize its position as one of the few places the rare Kirtland's warbler bird calls home, according to United States Forest Service officials.

"It's obvious that the Kirtland's warbler has not been a real positive part of the community in the past," said Phil Huber, USFS wildlife biologist and the Kirtland's warbler management program coordinator.

The USFS manages the Kirtland's warbler population under the direction of the Endangered Species Act.

There are only 347 pairs of birds known to exist.

The Endangered Species Act mandates protection of listed species from any source of harm.

Kirtland's warbler has been on the endangered list for 20 years.

Part of the USFS's management practices include clear cutting forest land to make Kirtland's warbler habitat and closing existing habitat to public entry during the birds' nesting season.

The closures run May 1 to as late as Sept. 10.

Neither of those aspects are popular with non-supporters of the program, but Huber said change is unlikely.

Instead, communities should begin to welcome the Kirtland's warbler.

"As a federal agency, we are required to manage for the bird and as long as it's around, the community should try to reap the benefits of having it," Huber said. "The bird only nests in northern Michigan woods and Mio is the center of its range. A lot of people come from around the world to see one."

Sighting tours are run by the USFS and Department of Natural Resources from Mio and Grayling between May 1 and July 4 when the male birds are singing to mark their territory.

Although the Mio area has 77 percent of the bird population with 266 nesting pairs, only about 300 to 400 birders come to the area each year for a glimpse of the bird.

From the Grayling site, where the odds of sighting the bird are not as good, there are about 1,000 people coming into the area each year.

"There's a lot of economic benefit there for a community that wants it," Huber said. "Traverse City has taken a common little, red fruit and made a big festival. We could begin building something around the Kirtland's warbler if people wanted to."

The bird already provides some economic benefits to the area, Huber said.

Research teams and bird watchers patronize area

## KIRTLAND WARBLER'S FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL



This open area was recently regenerated to provide future suitable nesting conditions for the Kirtland's Warbler. This endangered warbler is a songbird that nests only in this area of Michigan and migrates to its wintering grounds in the Bahamas. It nests only in young jack pine forests on sandy soils. Adequate nesting areas consist of approximately 320 acres or larger. The Kirtland's Warbler management areas are usually burned to reduce the residues left from logging. The areas are then densely planted with jack pine seedlings. About 1250 seedlings per acre are planted to create desirable nesting conditions.

Kirtland's Warblers will begin nesting in areas such as this one when the trees reach about 5 feet high (about seven years old). The warbler will nest on the ground along the edges of small openings. They will continue to use this area until the needles on the lower branches of the trees start dropping off. This usually occurs when the trees reach a height of 18 to 20 feet (about 20 years old).

This area will be harvested again after the trees reach about 50 years old and the warblers have ceased nesting here. Repeating the cycle will result in a continuous supply of nesting habitat for the warbler. These areas also provide important habitat for other species such as Upland Sandpipers, Bluebirds, Kestrels, Snowshoe Hares, and Whitetail Deer.

Kirtland's Warbler habitat management is a combined effort of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Michigan Audubon Society.

### New signs explaining the plight of the Kirtland's warbler and its management program will be placed near the bird's habitat this year.

businesses, and the management program projects create jobs.

Huber proposes that the resource agencies, county governments, businesses and leaders work together to form promotion ideas such as advertising in bird watching magazines or sending invitations for people to return with places to stay, eat, shop and other activities listed to increase the benefits of having the bird.

The promotion would not have to focus only on the Kirtland's warbler, as the forest has other uncommon species bird watchers could come see.

Paul Pasternak, Mio Area

Chamber of Commerce president, said the idea bears looking into.

"The river and woods are slowly being closed down on us and we don't have much more up here to draw people," Pasternak said. "But it wouldn't be a small job changing people's attitudes. You can go just about anywhere and you're not going to hear good things about the bird."

To even begin promoting the bird, Huber said public relations would definitely have to start at home, something he plans to do anyway.

"The Forest Service will be trying to give the community a

better understanding of the management program... trying to get more locals to go on the tour and also explain the cutting and closures," Huber said. "We're also in the early stages of revising the Kirtland's warbler management plan and there could be some modifications to make the cuttings visually less severe."

Huber said public comment would be asked for within the next year.

If groups or organizations are interested in hearing about the Kirtland's warbler, or arranging a tour this spring, they can call the USFS Mio District at 826-3252.

**GRAND OPENING**  
**CRITTERS & CREATIONS**  
**BOUTIQUE**

Friday & Saturday, April 10 & 11  
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Located in  
The Community Federal Credit Union Building  
in Lewiston

—ALL HANDMADE CRAFTS—  
786-3354

SERVING ALL MICHIGAN CEMETERIES

**Orr Funeral Home**  
Authorized Rock of Ages Dealer  
318 Pearl Street, Mio, MI  
(517) 826-5505