

# Razing forests helps wildlife; rankled neighbors don't like it

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GRAYLING — Government officials say birds, deer and other wildlife benefit when large stretches of forest are periodically razed.

But in northern and central Lower Michigan, some residents are questioning the policy of clearing away the trees they want to live among.

The state Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Department of Agriculture allow clearcutting — razing all trees in an area at one time — to let mature stands of aspen, jack pine or black or pin oak reach adult size.

Aspen and jack pine can't grow properly in the shade of other trees.

In Crawford, Oscoda, Roscommon and Ogemaw counties, 5- to 15-year-old jack pines shelter the Kirtland warbler, an endangered bird that nests only in Michigan. Wildlife officials regularly clearcut on a 143,000-acre area across 10 Lower

Peninsula counties to help the warbler.

But William Stenglein of Lovells says clearcutting has left his native Crawford County "the raggiest part of Michigan.

"In terms of natural environment, it's a ghetto," he said. "It's a slum.

"I got mad about three or four years ago. I looked at all the tall forests being cut out and all this jack pine going in. I've seen a complete attack on biodiversity."

The clearcutting of state forests has intensified the past 10 years because many trees are maturing about the same time, state officials said. The trees started to regenerate in the early 1900s after several large fires and the end of extensive logging.

William Mittig is a DNR forest manager who oversees 750,000 acres of state-owned forest in Crawford, Oscoda, Alcona, Iosco, Ogemaw, Roscommon, Clare, Gladwin, Arenac, Midland, Isabella and Bay counties. Each year, he said, the DNR allows 9,000 acres in the state forest

to be clearcut.

The Kirtland's warbler had ample habitat before man settled northern Lower Michigan because fires allowed younger jack pines to grow, said Philip Huber, a wildlife biologist for the Agriculture Department's Forest Service.

Firefighters have become better at controlling fires in recent decades, Huber said. That requires more clearcutting of large tracts of jack pines to provide homes for the warblers, he said.

White-tail deer feed on jack pine stands, and the trees assist the growth of grass, another deer food. Jack pine stands also provide habitat for the upland sandpiper, bluebirds, kestrels and snowshoe hares.

But Wayne Mack of Sterling said clearcutting has ravaged too much state forest, including the Au Sable State Forest in Arenac County.

"What shook me up real bad was that the place I used to hunt ... lost all its trees, all my hunting land had been cut down," said Mack, 75.