

River Road, RFD  
Waterville, Ohio  
July 25, 1957

Mr. G. S. McIntire, Chief  
Forestry Division  
Department of Conservation  
Lansing 26, Michigan

RE: Kirtland's Warbler Preserve

Dear Mr. McIntire:

In July, 1956, the Michigan Conservation Commission voted to set aside and manage some state forest lands for the benefit of the Kirtland's Warbler. This project was referred to you, and the Michigan Audubon Society was invited to name an advisory committee, of which I was appointed chairman. Since my discussion of this matter with you in Lansing last summer, all of the members of the committee have examined a number of tracts of land, aided by preliminary exploration by men in the Conservation Department at Mio.

In view of the valuable help given by members of the Game Division, Mr. Byelich, Mr. Ryel, and Mr. Dockham, we are giving Mr. Ruhl a copy of this letter. We are also giving Mr. Douglass a copy of the letter, since he was a participant in our early discussions of this idea.

The committee appointed by E. M. Brigham of Battle Creek, president of the Michigan Audubon Society, was as follows:

Harold Mayfield, Toledo (Chairman)  
Josselyn Van Tyne, Ann Arbor (since deceased)  
Fenn Holden, Grayling  
Andrew J. Berger, Ann Arbor  
Verne Dockham, Mio

(It is probable that this committee will be supplemented by two additional members soon.)

This is the report of the committee, submitted in the form of recommendations to the Conservation Department.

I will be very happy to visit Lansing to talk with you and others about details of this project if you think such a visit would be worthwhile.

#### Objective

The objective of this project is to create and maintain one or more permanent sites for the nesting of the Kirtland's Warbler. Such sites will preserve a few places on public lands where people may see and study this rare songbird in the future. Since this bird nests nowhere else at present but in the state of Michigan and may some day be named Michigan State Bird, interest in it will certainly grow in the years

ahead. Although the bird is not now threatened with extinction because of lack of suitable nesting territory, it is not inconceivable that better control of forest fires and changing land use might reduce the suitable nesting areas toward the vanishing point at some time in the future. For example, there are some counties in Michigan where the bird formerly nested but where there are no suitable areas today. There are grounds for believing that the bird formerly nested in the jack pines of Minnesota and Wisconsin where there are no suitable areas today.

It is also within the realm of possibility that a decline in the numbers of this bird may call for rigorous control of the cowbird on at least a few areas at some time in the future.

### Preferred Sites

This committee has examined a number of prospective sites and has found three that it is prepared to recommend. We believe it might be well to have more than one site so that the project will not be destroyed by one fire. Also, we think there might be an advantage in having scattered sites from the standpoint of the convenience of people visiting these areas and from the standpoint of forestry management. (Each of these sites, we believe, is in a different forestry district.) Each of these sites is a square consisting of approximately four sections, all or nearly all under state ownership. These sites are not listed in any order of preference.

#### 1. Lovells Area

Sections 5, 6, 7, and 8. T 28 N, R 1 W

These four sections are mostly open grasslands, with a few islands of large jack pines each with a fringe of naturally seeded smaller pines. Although the acreage suitable for Kirtland's Warblers is very slight, there are several pairs already here. It seems almost certain that the present population of warblers could be enormously increased by planting pines. The suitability of the area is further demonstrated by the fact that much of the early research on the Kirtland's Warbler was done within the vicinity of Lovells.

#### 2. Red Oak Area

Sections 11, 12, 13, and 14. T 27 N, R 1 E

This area, particularly section 12 and those portions of the other three sections near their common intersection, was regarded a few years ago as the most productive area for Kirtland's warblers known up to that time. Now the pines have become too large for warblers but, except for islands of larger trees, are still some years from marketable size. Therefore, any portions of these sections made available to the Kirtland's Warbler would need to be first burned and then planted. This site is near the center of the nesting range of the species.

3. Ogemaw Game Refuge Area

Sections 21, 22, 27, and 28. T 24 N, R 1 E

More than half of sections 27 and 28 are now grasslands with patches of young jack pines resulting from a fire in 1946. Although this tract is on the edge of the range of the Kirtland's Warbler and the acreage now holding pines of the right size is small, there are some birds already on this site. The population could be greatly increased by planting portions of the grasslands in sections 27 and 28 and at a later date utilizing sections 21 and 22. Sections 21 and 22 are now covered with large pines, perhaps of marketable size. It might be advisable to have these cut clean when harvested at some date in the future and then be planted or be allowed to come back naturally.

Management

We suggest that the long-range objective in the management of each site be to maintain at least one section in each location in suitable condition to attract the Kirtland's Warbler as a nesting bird. A four-section block in each location will permit some selectivity in developing the most suitable portions in order to achieve the goal of at least one complete section in proper condition for the birds.

A suitable site for the bird consists of pines at least four feet tall and not more than 15 feet tall, growing in thickets (that is, with the branches of adjacent trees touching), interspersed with openings. Please note that we consider the openings of equal importance to the size of the trees.

A considerable acreage of this description is necessary to attract the bird, since it ordinarily occurs in colonies. Therefore, we would recommend that units of land consisting of at least 160 acres be dealt with at one time.

We believe the forestry division should have some latitude in determining how best to achieve these general objectives. However, we are offering a few suggestions on details as follows:

We suggest that the objective of the forestry division at each location would be semi-open pine lands with trees in three age groups:

1. Just becoming suitable - 5 to 8 years old
2. Prime - 12 to 15 years old
3. Ripe for burning and replanting - 19 to 22 years old

Note that this provides a 21-year cycle in three steps of seven years each.

Management - cont.

In order to guarantee sufficient openings, we suggest that the plantings be made in strips one chain in width, separated by unplanted strips one chain in width, following the contour of the land and stand edge but leaving two chains' width of opening at the stand edge.

We suggest that heavy furrowing be avoided partly to minimize destruction of existing ground cover and partly for ease in walking. We believe that convenience can determine the row width, recognizing that narrow rows will probably become suitable sooner.

We hope that there may be some interest on the part of the forestry people in trying some other species, such as red pine or even spruce, in limited areas within a larger plot for comparative purposes.

We suspect that the bird may not have any preference among the various conifers, provided that the basic requirement (pine thickets interspersed with openings) are provided in sufficient quantity on dry, sandy land within the range of the bird.

We do not expect the Conservation Department to conduct research on this species, but we feel assured that the exceptional interest this bird holds for ornithologists will guarantee an ample supply of students, amateur and professional, who will note the results of these efforts with the greatest of care through generations to come. These students can be expected to carry out various research investigations in cooperation with the Conservation Department.

Respectfully submitted,

Harold Mayfield

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CC - Mr. H. D. Ruhl  
Mr. D. W. Douglass