

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
FOREST SERVICE

Wino Ranger District

REPLY TO: 2630 Wildlife Habitat

March 27, 1978

SUBJECT: Full-tree Harvesting in Kirtland's Warbler Management Areas



TO: Forest Supervisor, Huron-Manistee N.F.

It appears that we may need some clarification on what timber harvest methods are permissible within areas identified as essential habitat for the Kirtland's Warbler.

To date, the recommended management prescription for warbler habitat is to: (1) final harvest the jack pine, (2) utilize a prescribed burn to eliminate slash and simulate fire conditions associated with warbler habitat created by natural burns, and (3) plant the area with jack pine seedlings at 1000 trees/acre (leaving approximately 1/5 of the area in small openings).

There is a good possibility that the practice of full-tree logging may affect the prescribed burning portion of our present management program. Full-tree harvesting tends to leave most of the sale area "clean" of logging debris, with the slash material accumulated in isolated piles. This situation will undoubtedly affect the intensity of a prescribed burn. The slash piles will probably burn very hot, with only a light burn carrying through the sedges and grasses in the "clean" areas between the slash piles.

At this time, there are no data available on the importance of burning as a prerequisite for desirable warbler nesting habitat. Some authorities feel that burning may be a crucial factor in providing the appropriate species composition and density of ground cover needed for nesting warblers. However, there is at least one known case where six pairs of Kirtland's Warblers nested in an area where no burning took place prior to planting. This nesting occurred in the McKinley R.W.M.A. in 1976. There were no Kirtland's Warblers nesting in this area in 1977.

Personnel from the North Central Forest Experiment Station (out of St. Paul, Minn.) are presently conducting research on habitat requirements of the Kirtland's. A portion of this study deals with evaluating burned and unburned habitat to determine if there are differences in the ground cover. This parameter is to be investigated during the 1978 field season.

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Full-tree harvesting is presently being conducted within essential warbler habitat on the Mio, Harrisville, and Tavas Districts. It is also planned for several sales that are to be opened in the near future. At the present time, it appears that full-tree logging is a permissible activity within Kirtland warbler management areas.

I believe that we should assess this situation to determine if this is a wise practice. It is recognized that a limitation to short-wood logging within the Warbler areas may decrease interest by potential bidders on future advertised sales. However, if it is determined that a heavy burn is an essential factor in providing Kirtland's warbler nesting habitat, the continued use of full-tree harvesting could be a violation of Section 7-Endangered Species Act of 1973.

We do have several CT clauses that would restrict this activity if it is deemed necessary (CT 312 and CT 6.72). A copy of these clauses is attached. Perhaps a green sheet supplement would clarify what our policy should be concerning this matter.

Sincerely,



DAVID J. SORENSON  
Wildlife Biologist

cc: Bill Irvine  
District Ranger-Mio  
Tavas  
Harrisville