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KIRTLAND*S WARBLERS AT A RECORD HIGH

□LANSING--According to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan's 1998 population of the endangered Kirtland's warbler is the highest recorded since the first census was done in 1951.

□Biologists, volunteers, and researchers counted 805 singing males during the official 1998 census period completed in mid-June, compared to 733 in 1997 and to the previous high of 766 in 1995. Low numbers were counted in 1987 and 1974, when only 167 singing males were found.

□The census was started in 1951, repeated in 1961, and has been done annually since 1971. The birds are counted by listening for their songs. In June, males establish territories and use their songs to fend off rival males and attract mates. The songs can be heard over one-quarter mile away, providing a method to count the birds with minimum amount of disturbance. The females do not sing. The total minimum breeding population is twice the number of singing males.

□The number of singing males found in ten northern Lower Peninsula counties were: Alcona 68, Clare 4, Crawford 175, Iosco 31, Kalkaska 24, Montmorency 2, Ogemaw 231, Oscoda 236, Otsego 10, and Roscommon 9. A total of 14 singing males were found in three Upper Peninsula counties: Delta 3, Marquette 5, and Schoolcraft 6. Females were observed with the males, indicating continuing nesting activity in the Upper Peninsula. The production of young has been confirmed in the Upper Peninsula each year since 1996. An additional singing male was located in northern Wisconsin.

□Kirtland*s warbler numbers are directly related to the amount of available nesting habitat. The Kirtland's warbler nests have been found only in jack pine stands located in northern Michigan. As a ground nester, the bird selects stands of trees between five and 20 feet high, with live branches that extend to the ground. Historically, these stands of young jack pine were maintained by naturally occurring wildfires that frequently swept through northern Michigan. Fire suppression programs altered this natural process, reducing Kirtland's warbler habitat.

□Wildlife biologists and foresters from state and federal agencies conduct a combination of clearcutting, burning, seeding, and replanting to mimic the effects of wildfire. Over 2,500 acres of jack pine trees were planted on state and federal lands in the spring of 1998. Over 1,000 additional acres will be planted in the fall. These areas will provide habitat for warblers in six to ten years.

□"The number of Kirtland's warblers counted in areas specifically planted for warbler nesting

habitat has continued to increase over the past several years; planted areas had over 76 percent of the population this year," said Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist Jerry Weinrich of the Roscommon Lower Peninsula Field Headquarters. "Additional new habitat will become available each year for the next several years, so there is reason to be optimistic that the warblers will continue to increase over the next few years."

□ "The success of the Kirtland's warbler management program shows that scientific wildlife management works. The cooperation among the DNR biologists and foresters, U. S. Forest Service, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Department of Military Affairs in restoring the warblers' nesting habitat is outstanding," said Ray Rustem, Heritage Program Supervisor, DNR Wildlife Division. "In addition to providing warbler habitat and forest products, the program provides valuable habitat for a wide variety of plant species, songbirds, and game animals."

□ The Kirtland's warbler survey is done over a ten-day period each year during the first two weeks of June. The 1998 survey was a joint effort of the Michigan DNR, U. S. Forest Service, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Michigan Department of Military Affairs, and citizen volunteers.

□ For more information on the Kirtland's warbler, contact the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, Natural Heritage Program, P. O. Box 30180, Lansing, MI 48909-7680.