



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Kirtland's Warbler

*Wildlife Management Area*

## Summary

*Draft*

## Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment

*April 2009*

### Introduction

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has released the Kirtland's Warbler Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan, or CCP, for public review and comment. The CCP describes goals for the WMA and the objectives and strategies needed to achieve those goals.

Providing habitat for Kirtland's Warbler is the primary purpose of the WMA, and the Draft CCP reflects that focus. The Service is proposing two primary changes in management. The first proposal is to consolidate land within the WMA through a land exchange with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and possibly the U.S. Forest Service. A land exchange would give the Service larger parcels of land and allow staff more options for land management, including the possible use of prescribed fire. The CCP also proposes increased emphasis on ecological integrity, emulating natural patterns, and managing for the broad array of wildlife species that depend on the jack pine ecosystem.

The Service completes a CCP for every refuge in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The plans outline how a refuge or wildlife management area will fulfill its legal pur-



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pose and contribute to the National Wildlife Refuge System's wildlife, habitat and public use goals. Comprehensive conservation plans articulate management goals for a 15-year period and specify the objectives and strategies needed to accomplish these goals.

Review and comment on the Kirtland's Warbler WMA Draft CCP by people who care about the WMA's future – neighbors, birders and wildlife watchers, local government officials, American Indian Tribes, the State of Michigan, and non-government organizations – are vital parts of the planning process. The purpose of the Draft CCP is to give every-

## Who We Are and What We Do

The Refuge is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the primary federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing the nation's fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. The Service oversees the enforcement of federal wildlife laws, management and protection of migratory bird populations, restoration of nationally significant fisheries, administration of the Endangered Species Act, and the

restoration of wildlife habitat such as wetlands. The Service also manages the National Wildlife Refuge System, which was founded in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated Pelican Island in Florida as a sanctuary for Brown Pelicans.

Today, the Refuge System is a network of over 550 refuges and 7,000 waterfowl production areas covering more than 150 million acres of public lands and waters. Overall, the Refuge

System provides habitat for more than 5,000 species of birds, mammals, fish, and insects. Refuges also provide unique opportunities for people. When it is compatible with wildlife and habitat conservation, they are places where people can enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and environmental interpretation.

one interested in the WMA's future an opportunity to review management alternatives and to comment on the plan. Sharing your views will contribute to a meaningful document that supports the recovery of Kirtland's Warbler and benefits other wildlife species as well as WMA neighbors.

Written comments can be sent via e-mail or mail; addresses are provided on page 5 of this summary. To be most useful as the Service completes the CCP, comments should be received by May 15, 2009.

Many factors will influence the Service's ability to fully implement the CCP, from drought to flooding to the availability of funding. Comprehensive conservation plans outline management direction, but they do not constitute a commitment for staffing increases, operational and maintenance increases, or funding for future land acquisition.

## Where to Find the Draft CCP

The Draft CCP is available in a variety of formats and places.

If you have access to a computer, you can see the plan in portable document format (pdf) at the Refuge's planning website:

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/planning/kirtland>

Paper copies and an electronic version of the plan are available at libraries throughout the area, including:

- Crawford County Library, Grayling, Michigan
- Harrison Community Library, Harrison, Michigan
- Gerrish-Higgins School District Public Library, Roscommon, Michigan
- West Branch District Library, West Branch, Michigan

- Michigan DNR Operation Service Center, Gaylord, Michigan
- Michigan DNR Operation Service Center, Roscommon, Michigan

Paper copies are available for individuals who want one. The Draft CCP is also available as a pdf document on CD-ROM. To request a copy, please call the Seney National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters at 906/586-9851. The Kirtland's Warbler WMA does not have its own staff but is managed by staff at Seney NWR.

## Vital Statistics

Kirtland's Warbler WMA was established in 1980 in response to the need for more land dedicated to the recovery of the Kirtland's Warbler. The Service established the wildlife management area in part due to the recommendations of



Female Kirtland's Warbler and nest. Photo credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team. The original goal was to acquire 7,500 acres of land on which habitat would be managed for the benefit of Kirtland's Warbler. At present, the area contains 125 separate tracts totaling 6,684 acres. While management for Kirtland's Warbler is paramount, the WMA provides habitat for a diversity of wildlife species, both migratory and non-migratory.

The staff at Seney NWR oversee the WMA and provide limited services on an as-needed basis. These duties include, but are not limited to, administration of timber sales, coordinating with the State on harvesting and replanting efforts, participation in Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team efforts, research, the Kirtland's Warbler census, Brown-headed Cowbird trapping, public education, and on-site law enforcement.

## Vision Statement

The planning team considered the past vision statements and emerging issues and drafted the following vision statement as the desired future state for the Kirtland's Warbler WMA:

“The Kirtland's Warbler Wildlife Management Area will be managed to promote jack pine ecosystems that contributes to a sustainable population of Kirtland's Warblers and associated wildlife species. Lands will be actively managed to mimic historic disturbance regimes and resulting structural and compositional attributes, such as dense stands of jack pine with barren-like openings, snags and coarse woody debris. Research will be encouraged and the public will be invited to learn about the jack pine ecosystem and the wildlife it supports.”

## Management Goals

Three goals were established for Kirtland's Warbler WMA:

- Goal 1: Wildlife – Management will play an integral role in the recovery of the Kirtland's Warbler. Kirtland's Warbler WMA lands will support the broad array of wildlife species that are dependent on each seral stage of the jack pine ecosystems (from barrens to mature jack pine).
- Goal 2: Habitat – Manage habitat to support Kirtland's Warblers and associated wildlife species by providing near benchmark conditions across all seral stages of the jack pine ecosystem. Employ sound management practices that emulate patterns of structure and composition resulting from wildfire and other natural disturbances.



Jack pine management? Photo credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Goal 3: People – Encourage the public to explore jack pine ecosystems and learn about its associated wildlife.

## The Planning Process

Work on the Kirtland's Warbler WMA CCP began in March 2006. Initially, members of the regional planning staff and Seney NWR staff identified a list of issues and concerns that were associated with the management of Kirtland's Warbler WMA. Refuge staff and Service planners then asked neighbors, organizations, local government units, and interested citizens to share their thoughts in an open house and through written comments.

In August 2006, the Service hosted an open house at Kirtland's Community College in Roscommon, Michigan. Four people attended the meeting, which had been announced in area newspapers and in-person contacts. The Service received six comments during the scoping process.

On February 21, 2007, members of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team and others met at the Michigan DNR, Gaylord Operations Center, at the Service's request to discuss the CCP and alternatives for future management of the Kirtland's Warbler WMA. The group discussed current management of the widespread land holdings of the Kirtland's Warbler WMA and ideas for more efficient management by all agencies that manage land as Kirtland's Warbler habitat.

On April 10, 2008, representatives of the Recovery Team and state and federal agencies met to discuss the possibility of consolidating Kirtland's Warbler WMA lands by exchanging lands with the Michigan DNR and/or the U.S. Forest Service.

## Issues Addressed in Planning

The following list of issues was generated by internal scoping, the public open house event and the workshop.

### Habitat Management

- **Forest Management:** How can we change current silvicultural practices to better emulate historic conditions?
- **Fire Management:** How can we restore prescribed fire to Kirtland's Warbler WMA lands?
- **Land Consolidation:** Kirtland's Warbler WMA parcels are inholdings within larger Michigan DNR parcels. Administration and habitat management would be more efficient if WMA parcels were consolidated into larger blocks by exchanging for other DNR or U.S. Forest Service lands.

### Wildlife Management

- **Brown-headed Cowbird Management:** Are there ways other than trapping to deal with Brown-headed Cowbirds?
- **Kirtland's Warbler Census:** Will we be able to census birds each year?
- **Delisting:** What can we do from a land management standpoint to facilitate delisting of the species?
- **Biodiversity:** What can be done to improve habitat for native species other than the Kirtland's Warbler?

### Public Use

- **Hunting:** Kirtland's Warbler WMA units are open to hunting per state regulations. Some hunting practices are generally not allowed on Refuge System lands such as baiting, construction of blinds, all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use, and using dogs to hunt bears.
- **Environmental Education:** If land exchange/consolidation occurs it would change outreach, interpretation, environmental education, staffing needs and opportunities.
- **Residential Development:** Rural housing construction causes direct habitat loss and complicates prescribed burning.

## What's Proposed

Three management alternatives are considered in the Environmental Assessment that accompanies the Draft CCP. One alternative, Alternative 3, has been identified as

the preferred alternative and developed more fully into the draft comprehensive conservation plan. The alternatives are briefly described in the following paragraphs and a table comparing the alternatives that begins on page 7.

### Alternative 1: Current Direction of Habitat Management (No Action)

The current management direction of Kirtland's Warbler WMA would be maintained under this alternative.

Under Alternative 1, intensive management of existing jack pine stands would continue to occur in close cooperation with the Michigan DNR, with the primary objective to produce dense jack pine plantations for Kirtland's Warbler breeding habitat. The WMA staff and Michigan DNR land managers would continue to monitor habitat prescription effects and make improvements in jack pine habitat management as it pertains primarily to Kirtland's Warbler.

Public use would follow the current direction and be linked to uses of the surrounding State lands. Environmental education and outreach would be conducted primarily by other agencies and non-government organizations.

### Alternative 2: Management from an Ecological Perspective

Alternative 2 would seek to make changes from the current high intensity habitat management that produces jack pine plantations for Kirtland's Warbler by trenching and planting.

Future management would continue to involve the Michigan DNR, but would use a more ecologically broad and holistic jack pine ecosystem management approach based on benchmark conditions derived from jack pine stands regenerated by wildfire. This alternative would include management practices that place a greater emphasis on ecological integrity. Management would include emulating wildfire-



Interpretive sign at Kirtland's Warbler WMA. Photo credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

## Sites Identified for Potential Exchange

Location	Concept	Potential Sites
Northern Lower Peninsula	Large acreage of Service lands currently exists. Exchanges would include Michigan DNR and Service lands only and would create fewer and larger parcels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pere Cheney Management Area - Staley Lake Mgmt. Area,</li> <li>▪ NW Ogemaw Management Area,</li> <li>▪ Leota Management Area,</li> <li>▪ Big Creek Management Area</li> </ul>
Northern Lower Peninsula	Create fewer and larger parcels closer to Seney NWR, but still within the northern lower Peninsula. Exchanges would include only Michigan DNR and Service lands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear Lake</li> </ul>
Northern Lower Peninsula	Consolidate into fewer, larger parcels and include Service, Forest Service and Michigan DNR lands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wurtsmith Block to Forest Service, Michigan DNR gets all Service lands, and Service gets unidentified Forest Service lands (multiple compartments).</li> </ul>
Upper Peninsula	Maintain close proximity to Seney NWR; opportunity to use prescribed fire as a management tool; minimal impact to existing ORV trails. Consolidation will only involve Service and Michigan DNR lands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ M-94 southwest of Seney NWR,</li> <li>▪ M-28 lands north of Seney NWR,</li> <li>▪ Danaher Plains Complex,</li> <li>▪ Ishpeming Area,</li> <li>▪ Big Two-Hearted River Country,</li> <li>▪ Private lands purchased in the Upper Peninsula by Michigan DNR going to the Service, Michigan DNR getting northern Lower Peninsula Service lands,</li> <li>▪ Baraga Plains,</li> <li>▪ Yellow Dog Plains.</li> </ul>

produced jack pine stand composition and structural patterns that result in greater biodiversity. Timber harvests would try to better emulate wildfire-produced stand conditions and a range of regeneration options would be used, including prescribed fire when and where possible.

Law enforcement and visitor use would receive greater emphasis. Enforcement of hunting regulations, trespass, and other violations would likely require more staff time and year-round presence.

Visitor use would be facilitated by delineating the boundaries of some properties, developing interpretive signs and conducting outreach to surrounding communities.

### Alternative 3: Ecological Management and Land Ownership Consolidation (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative 3 would seek to manage existing lands as suggested in Alternative 2, but would also explore land exchanges with the State (and possibly U.S. Forest Service) to consolidate DNR and WMA parcels. Proposed land exchanges would likely increase the total area of land managed for Kirtland’s Warbler, as well as increase management efficiency by both Federal and State agencies. See the table for a description of sites discussed

Existing lands and any new lands acquired through exchange would be managed to benefit the Kirtland’s Warbler and other native flora and fauna of jack pine ecosystems. However, the management of jack pine stands

would shift away from plantations toward a more ecologically-based approach that better emulates natural, wildfire-generated jack pine stands.

As an example, if consolidation were to occur and the Service obtained upland jack pine stands in the eastern Upper Peninsula, prescribed fire would be a more likely management tool.

## Tell Us What You Think

Your thoughts are an essential part of making the CCP a visionary and practical document that improves habitat for wildlife. In order for your comments to be considered during preparation of the Final CCP, we need to receive your comment by May 15, 2009.

You have a variety of opportunities to communicate your thoughts on the Draft CCP. First, you are welcome to write us a letter. Address written comments to:

Seney NWR  
 Attention: Kirtland’s Warbler WMA CCP  
 1674 Refuge Entrance Road  
 Seney, MI 49883

Comments are also welcome via e-mail: [r3planning@fws.gov](mailto:r3planning@fws.gov) (please specify “Kirtland’s Warbler WMA CCP Comment” in the subject line).

## Comparison of Objectives and Environmental Consequences by Management Alternatives

Alternative 1: Current Direction of Habitat Management (No Action)	Alternative 2: Management from an Ecological Perspective	Alternative 3: Ecological Management and Land Ownership Consolidation (Preferred Alternative)
<p>Goal 1: Wildlife – Management will play an integral role in the recovery of the Kirtland’s Warbler. Kirtland’s Warbler WMA lands will support the broad array of wildlife species that are dependent on each seral stage of the jack pine ecosystems (from barrens to mature jack pine).</p>		
<p><b>Objective 1.1:</b> Continue to be an active partner in the Kirtland’s Warbler recovery effort.</p>	<p><b>Objective 1.1:</b> Same as Alternative 1</p>	<p><b>Objective 1.1:</b> Same as Alternative 1.</p>
<p><i>Strategies:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Participate in the annual Kirtland’s Warbler Census to aid in monitoring the population trends.</li> <li>■ Work with Ecological Services to continue annual trapping efforts to remove Brown-headed Cowbirds from nesting areas and explore new ways to eliminate cowbirds parasitism of Kirtland’s Warbler nests.</li> <li>■ Coordinate harvest and regeneration of jack pine, on Kirtland’s Warbler WMA lands with the, Michigan DNR to insure that the Services lands are contributing to the Kirtland’s Warbler recovery effort.</li> <li>■ Conduct and participate in research to better understand the ecology and management of Kirtland’s Warbler populations.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategies:</i></p> <p>Same as Alternative 1</p>	<p><i>Strategies:</i></p> <p>Same as Alternative 1</p>
<p><b>Objective 1.2:</b> By 2016, implement a monitoring program to track the presence, abundance, population trends, and/or habitat associations of Trust Resources and determine ways to emulate natural species diversity.</p>	<p><b>Objective 1.2:</b> Same as Alternative 1.</p>	<p><b>Objective 1.2:</b> Same as Alternative 1.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Determine the presence, abundance and habitat associations of Trust Resources currently using Kirtland’s Warbler WMA lands.</li> <li>■ Develop and implement a monitoring program to track population trends, and/or habitat associations of Trust Resources.</li> <li>■ Conduct annual reviews of trends to determine if there are priorities for research or management.</li> <li>■ If a Trust Resource research or management issue is identified, initiate action at the local level. If the issue goes beyond the boundary of the Kirtland’s Warbler WMA, take lead role in coordinating with federal, state, and NGO partners to develop broader scale projects to resolve issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Same as Alternative 1 but including:</li> <li>■ Hire a Refuge Manager to be located in the WMA.</li> <li>■ Provide facilities for local staff including an office and storage areas.</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative 1</p>

## Comparison of Objectives and Environmental Consequences by Management Alternatives

Alternative 1: Current Direction of Habitat Management (No Action)	Alternative 2: Management from an Ecological Perspective	Alternative 3: Ecological Management and Land Ownership Consolidation (Preferred Alternative)
<p>Goal 2: Habitat – Manage habitat to support Kirtland’s Warblers and associated wildlife species by providing near benchmark conditions across all seral stages of the jack pine ecosystem. Employ sound management practices that emulate patterns of structure and composition resulting from wildfire and other natural disturbances.</p>		
<p><b>Objective 2.1:</b> Continue to manage jack pine stands in conjunction with Michigan DNR, but place greater emphasis on promoting ecological integrity within managed stands.</p>	<p><b>Objective 2.1:</b> Continue to manage jack pine stands in conjunction with Michigan DNR, but place greater emphasis on promoting ecological integrity within managed stands. Emulate natural structural and compositional patterns of jack pine forests produced through wildfire.</p>	<p><b>Objective 2.1:</b> Continue to manage jack pine stands in conjunction with Michigan DNR, but place greater emphasis on promoting ecological integrity within managed stands.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with Federal, State and local officials to garner support for the use of prescribed fire in the management of jack pine to create Kirtland’s Warbler nesting habitat.</li> <li>▪ Work with Federal, State and local fire officials to employ prescribed fire as a management tool where it can be applied safely without risk to life and property.</li> <li>▪ Elsewhere, attempt to emulate the compositional and structural patterns of jack pine stands resulting from wildfire through mechanical treatments (i.e. timber sales). Place increased emphasis on maintaining “legacy” trees (e.g., large red and white pine, red and white oak, etc.) and providing more (and larger) standing snags and coarse woody debris.</li> <li>▪ Parcels that contain habitats other than jack pine will be managed to emulate patterns resulting from natural disturbances.</li> <li>▪ Develop research demonstration sites that exemplify ecologically-based jack pine management and illustrate how emulating natural conditions can provide multiple species benefits.</li> <li>▪ Develop a map and monitor spotted knapweed distribution within and near Kirtland’s Warbler WMA parcels. Initiate removal if the species spreads into nesting areas.</li> </ul>	<p>Same as Alternative 1</p>	<p>Same as Alternative 1.</p>
<p>Not Applicable</p>	<p>Not Applicable</p>	<p><b>Objective 2.2: Land Consolidation</b> – Within 5 years of completion of this CCP, develop a land consolidation plan for the Kirtland’s Warbler WMA that maintains or increase habitat for the warbler and increase management efficiency for all agencies involved.</p>

## Comparison of Objectives and Environmental Consequences by Management Alternatives

Alternative 1: Current Direction of Habitat Management (No Action)	Alternative 2: Management from an Ecological Perspective	Alternative 3: Ecological Management and Land Ownership Consolidation (Preferred Alternative)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interagency team will follow land consolidation guidelines to establish priority exchange scenarios</li> <li>▪ Land appraisals, following Federal and State guidelines, will be conducted on all lands identified for exchange.</li> </ul>
Goal 3: People – Encourage the public to explore jack pine ecosystems and learn about its associated wildlife.		
<b>Objective 3.1 – Hunting:</b> Provide the public with opportunities to hunt on Kirtland’s Warbler WMA lands in accordance with state and Federal regulations.	<b>Objective 3.1 – Hunting:</b> Same as Alternative 1.	<b>Objective 3.1 – Hunting:</b> Same as Alternative 1.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase law enforcement on Service properties to ensure consistency with Federal hunting regulations (e.g. no deer baiting, permanent blinds, bear hunting with dogs, and off-road vehicle use).</li> <li>▪ In cooperation with the Michigan DNR, produce maps to show the hunting public areas subject to Federal regulations.</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative 1 but including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hire a Refuge Operations Specialist with law enforcement credentials.</li> <li>▪ Post the boundaries of WMA parcels with appropriate refuge signs.</li> <li>▪ Develop interpretive signs and place them at key locations.</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative 1.
<b>Objective 3.2 – Wildlife Observation, Wildlife Photography, Environmental Education and Environmental Interpretation:</b> Within 5 years of approval of the plan, increase opportunities for wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation to correspond with an increase (from 2008 level) in WMA visitation. The level of knowledge about, and the positive attitude toward, the WMA will increase among visitors throughout the next 15 years.	<b>Objective 3.2 – Wildlife Observation, Wildlife Photography, Environmental Education and Environmental Interpretation:</b> Within 10 years of approval of the plan, increase opportunities for wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation to correspond with an increase (from 2008 level) in WMA visitation. The level of knowledge about, and the positive attitude toward, the WMA will increase among visitors throughout the next 15 years.	<b>Objective 3.2 – Wildlife Observation, Wildlife Photography, Environmental Education and Environmental Interpretation:</b> Same as Alternative 1.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue active support of the annual Kirtland’s Warbler Festival and Tours.</li> <li>▪ Encourage wildlife-dependent activities on Kirtland’s Warbler WMA lands by providing outreach materials, such as brochures and displays, at local public events and in community facilities.</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative 1 but including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hire a full-time Visitor Services specialist to increase community outreach and involvement.</li> </ul>	Same as Alternative 1.