

Chapter 2: The Planning Process

The CCP for Kirtland's Warbler WMA has been written with input and assistance from citizens, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and staff from state and local agencies. The participation of these stakeholders is vital and all of their ideas have been valuable in determining the future direction of the WMA.

Internal Agency Scoping

The CCP planning process began in March 2006 with a kickoff meeting between Seney NWR staff and regional planners from the Service's office in St. Paul. The participants in this "internal scoping" exercise reviewed the Kirtland's Warbler WMA vision statements and goals, existing baseline resource data, planning documents and other information. In addition, the group identified a preliminary list of issues, concerns and opportunities facing the WMA that would need to be addressed in the CCP.

A list of required CCP elements such as maps, photos, and GIS data layers was also developed at this meeting and during subsequent e-mail and telephone communications. Concurrently, the group studied federal and state mandates plus applicable local ordinances, regulations, and plans for their relevance to this planning effort. Finally, the group agreed to a process and sequence for obtaining public input and a tentative schedule for completion of the CCP. A Public Involvement Plan was drafted and distributed to participants immediately after the meeting.

Open House Event

Public input was encouraged and obtained using several methods, including hosting an open house, written comments during a public scoping period and personal contacts.



Jack pine harvest. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service photo.

Initial public scoping for the Kirtland's Warbler WMA began in August 2006 with an open house event held at Kirtland Community College in Roscommon, Michigan. Turn-out was light with four people attending despite widespread notification in area newspapers and in-person contacts. Comment forms were available at the event and made available at the Seney NWR headquarters and Visitor Center during the following weeks.

Those interested in making written comments had until October 2006 to submit them. Comments could be sent by U.S. mail, e-mail, or via the Seney planning website on the Internet. Six comment forms and other written comments were received during the scoping process.

Workshops

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 War-

bler WMA. Nearly all members of the team attended including additional staff from local DNR offices, several Service field stations, and representatives from the U.S. Forest Service and two universities. 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, a small group 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. The group consisted of two to three representatives from each agency. It was agreed that consolidation could increase management efficiency for each agency involved. Criteria for land consolidation were agreed upon and will be discussed in the management section of this document.

Summary of Issues, Concerns and Opportunities

The following list of issues was generated by internal scoping, the public open house event and the workshop. Each issue will be described in more detail in the following chapters of this plan.

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.



Northern Flicker. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service photo.

Preparation, Publishing, Finalization and Implementation of the CCP

The Kirtland's Warbler draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment was prepared by a team from Seney NWR, the Service's Regional Office in Minneapolis and a representative of the Michigan DNR. The CCP/EA was published in two phases (draft and final) and in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA (Appendix A) presents a range of alternatives for future management and identifies the preferred alternative, which is also the CCP.

Verbal and written comments received by the Service were incorporated where appropriate. The alternative that was ultimately selected, Alternative 3, became the basis of the ensuing Final CCP. This document then becomes the basis for guiding management on the WMA over the coming 15-year period. It will guide the development of more detailed step-down management plans for specific resource areas, and it will underpin the annual budgeting process through Service-wide allocation databases. Most importantly, it lays out the general approach to managing habitat, wildlife, and people at the Kirtland's Warbler WMA that will direct day-to-day decision-making and actions.

Public Comments on the Draft CCP

The Draft CCP/EA was released for public review on April 3, 2009; the comment period lasted 42 days and ended May 15, 2009. By the conclusion of the comment period we received five written responses by organizations and individuals. In response to these comments we made a number of minor edits to the final document. All respondents who expressed an opinion endorsed the selection of Alternative 3 and the general approach of the proposed future management of the Kirtland's Warbler WMA. We were able to incorporate all of the specific technical and grammatical changes suggested in the written comments. Consequently, we did not produce a formal Response to Comments Appendix for this CCP.