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Roscommon, Michigan 48653
Region II
January 24, 1991

J.L. Williams & Associates
North Down River Road
Rural Road #3, Box 3365B-A
Grayling, MI 49738

Dear Mr. Williams:

Thank you for your earlier letter about concerns that you and some of your neighbors have regarding forest management practices in eastern Crawford County.

I promised to answer your letter in more detail and will now try to address each point you raised.

I appreciate the time you allowed me to address these issues since they are quite detailed and often can be misunderstood.

Enclosed is a map of Crawford County showing Kirtland's Warbler Management Areas. These cover more than 35,000 acres of state and federal forest land. Within these areas are numerous smaller areas that are not managed for jack pine. For example, the Crawford Red Pine Natural Area is within the North Down River Area in Section 30 of T27N, R1W. The fire-scarred old growth red pines and associated vegetation there are considered part of the Kirtland's warbler pine barrens ecosystem complex and will be left uncut for scientific and educational value. There are also many pockets of other vegetative types which will be managed as aspen, lowland conifers, etc. The remainder of these Management Areas will be managed for jack pine and Kirtland's warbler habitat on a 50-year rotation. All of the Areas occupy land that has a long history of frequent wildfires. More than half of these tracts were probably frequently burned pine barrens in pre-settlement times.

The concerns you expressed to me included:

- < **Public Involvement** - That there has been no public involvement in the decision-making process for clearcutting, yet it impacts the quality of life for every landowner in the vicinity, and apparently has a negative effect on the recreational user as well.

Our response is that state lands managed for Kirtland's warbler received public review at the time the Management Plan was implemented in 1981. An Environmental Impact Statement was prepared by the State. It was released as an Environmental Assessment by the federal government.

An advertised public hearing for the Management Plan was held at the Kirtland Community College. There were no Area by Area local hearings.

Since then the public has had the opportunity to comment on individual treatment schedules at annual area forest Compartment Reviews. These Compartment Reviews are open to the public and are attended by representatives of several DNR divisions (Wildlife, Forest Management and others), by representatives of the Department of Military Affairs (Crawford and Kalkaska Counties), and often by township and organization representatives, local landowners, and other concerned residents and citizens. Township officials in the Lovells area have been particularly faithful in showing up for these planning sessions. They have asked for and received many changes for visual management along roadways and adjacent to private property.

- < **Growth Management** - That you have spent thirty years in developing public policy, and can tell from experience that during most of that time the state has operated under an implied policy of sustained growth. The sustained growth policy is to define the carrying capacity of the resource and then manage against that limitation. Growth management on the other hand, defines the changing demand on the resource and then manages change to insure orderly growth, and you believe that's the confusion that you are experiencing in the case of the Kirtland's Warbler Program!

Our response is that there are several options for managing land in the Kirtland's warbler areas. The approved plan and the plan we are following today has widest acceptance.

Option 1) Do nothing. Under this option natural forces would be left to reign free. No timber would be cut. Wildfires would be allowed to run their course as older timber becomes increasingly fire prone. Much of the land would revert to pine barrens. We believe this is an unacceptable option. People must have fire protection. Jack pine is a valuable resource that need not be wasted.

- Option 2) Selective harvest. These lands do not naturally grow stands of trees that can be managed for selective harvest. Even the species of oak on these lands is fire adapted and would decline under selective management. Red pine might be planted on these lands, and managed selectively, but this would preclude use of areas by the Kirtland's warbler, and it would be extremely detrimental to most other wildlife and to most native plant species.
- Option 3) Clearcutting with small cutting blocks (40-80 acres). This would produce minimum visual impact, especially if chip harvesting were employed. Timber could be sold during good market conditions in spite of the smaller sales. Significant volumes of merchantable timber would probably not be utilized. The land, however, would rarely be replanted by the Forest Management Division because the cost of planting exceeds expected future revenue from timber sold. State reforestation funds are always exhausted on better sites, leaving nothing for these, the poorest forest lands in Michigan. Several species of wildlife would do well (several others would not), but the Kirtland's warbler does not normally colonize small areas. The public would object to a cut and leave approach because natural regeneration would be very sparse at best. The Federal government would probably cancel its Cooperative Agreement with Michigan under the federal Endangered Species Act. State and national environmental groups would actively oppose this option.
- Option 4) Reduce the land area in Kirtland's warbler management by 1/2 by using a 25 rather than 50-year rotation. This could provide the same amount of habitat for the warbler, but it would not yield commercial timber and would therefore be a very expensive option.

It would be detrimental to wildlife such as deer and wild turkeys which use acorns produced by the oaks when they are 25 to 50 years old. The short rotation would also eliminate habitat for spruce grouse which are found in the lower peninsula only on these Warbler Management Areas. It would also be detrimental to the birds and mammals which use tree cavities since very few usable cavities would be available with this option. It would be necessary to retain the best management areas in the plan so all of the Crawford County Areas would probably be retained. This option might provide the best wildfire protection. It would certainly have an adverse effect on the local timber industry.

Option 5) The present plan. Cutting blocks are large (100+ acres) to simulate the original fire-sculpted landscape. A natural rotation of 50-years for jack pine on these poor sites is scheduled in a steady state manner so that at any given time a management unit will have 20% in regenerating stands, 20% in young jack pine occupied by Kirtland's warbler, and 60% in older forest. The federal government pays for replanting trees with Endangered Species Act appropriations. Many species of native wildlife and plants benefit. State and local wood products economy benefits.

- < **Information Meeting** - You have a high regard for the Department's authority to establish policy for managing the natural environment in Michigan. However, you also believe that public input to review and modify policy to consider local needs would not only enhance the DNR's ability to implement, but would at the same time relieve some anxiety among the landowners, and reduce the potential for conflict.

What you suggest is a meeting with representatives from the special interest groups where we can explain the Kirtland's warbler program, and the long range effects of clearcutting. Then establish some formal process for input by local groups, that will avoid confusion and uncertainty in the future.

If we agree to such a meeting, you believe that it could be arranged by one of the associations, and they in turn would be responsible for inviting other interested parties. A Saturday meeting would be best since most people are not available during the week.

I think this could be very productive and helpful to all of us. It would be a good time to bring more people into an understanding of the special features of Crawford County. The U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staffs might also be interested in participating.

Endangered Species Rating

- < Is there a procedure for identifying and prioritizing endangered species and if so how is the Kirtland's warbler rated?

It's expensive to preserve endangered species and we can be sure that at some point in the future such a policy will have to stand the test of economics!

Both the state and federal listing procedures employ panels of experts who propose species for listing as "endangered," "threatened," or "special concern." Species listed as "endangered" by both the state and federal agencies are those which are most in danger of extinction. No formal procedure is used to rank (prioritize) species within each classification, but priorities for spending are informally determined in consideration of the species' degree of endangerment, cost and feasibility of managing for species recovery, and appeal of the species to the public. The Kirtland's warbler has consistently been afforded high priority for management by the Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Forest Service.

> **150,000 Acres in designated management units**

Does the 150,000 acres referred to in your letter include the entire Kirtland's warbler range, or is this Crawford County?

The 150,000 acres includes the state and federal programs (both U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service lands). It is comprised of lands in 11 different counties (from Kalkaska to Iosco County and from Presque Isle to Clare County).

> **Mixed Cover**

Can the forest cover be mixed so that there is habitat for other species in the same area?

As mentioned before, most Management Areas include areas of other cover types (lowlands, hardwoods) which are not managed for warbler habitat. Within the cutting blocks there may also be small inclusions of oak or aspen, but in general these areas are nearly pure jack pine stands (as they have been for hundreds of years).

> **Leave Hardwoods**

Why can't some of the hardwoods be left standing, they usually cover minimal area and take so long to grow!

Aspen and northern pin oak are short-lived species on these poor sites and they are perpetuated by clearcutting. Very few other hardwoods grow on these sites. In special situations, as along main roads, we have left clumps or groves of oak, but leaving all hardwoods would not be conducive to optimal use of these area by the warbler.

> Other Clearcut Areas

There are many other clearcut areas that do not seem to be related to the Kirtland's warbler program. How is multiple land use coordinated with other divisions in the DNR?

The Compartment Review process is used for all state forest lands as a means to coordinate land use concerns of the responsible Divisions. Yes, there are many clearcuts which are not part of Kirtland's warbler management and we try to tailor these to enhance habitat for deer, ruffed grouse, snowshoe hare and other wildlife species.

> **Aesthetics and Barren Look**

Can these clearcut areas be managed to improve the aesthetics and alleviate the barren look that we have in the county now?

In the Warbler Management Areas, approximately 40% of the area will need to look open or savannah-like to meet habitat needs for this species. (These areas are certainly also used by a large number of other wildlife species, including uncommon ones such as upland sandpipers, bluebirds, marsh hawks and sharptailed grouse and many common ones like deer, nighthawks, hermit thrushes, brown thrashers, vesper sparrows, and kestrels.) In the non-warbler areas especially greater consideration has certainly been given to visual management in recent years (and we are still improving our efforts to this end).

> **Other endangered species likely to compete for these areas.**

What other species are likely to be declared endangered that will compete for the same basic resource?

None are likely to compete as long as management for Kirtland's warbler continues. There are several State threatened, Special Concern, or regionally rare species which are favored by management for Kirtland's warbler, e.g. Hill's thistle, rough fescue, pale Agoceris (all uncommon prairie plants), upland sandpipers, clay-colored sparrow, and spruce grouse.

> **Program Evaluation**

What data and/or information do we have that these planted areas are actually used, and in fact, how many areas are never used for breeding by Kirtland's warbler?

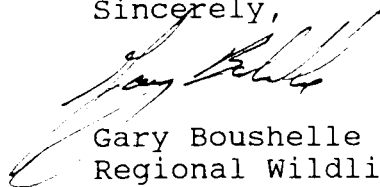
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We conduct a full census of singing male Kirtland's warblers every year in June. The oldest plantations resulting from the Habitat Management Plan have just entered the stage when they would likely be used by warblers (and most are now being occupied by the warbler). Our observations of warbler use of older plantations (pre-management plan origin) suggest that warblers will occupy and nest in these plantations at relatively high densities - provided they are on these poor jack pine sites, of large acreage, and that tree density of jack pines is quite high. Areas planted specifically for warbler habitat (before the Habitat Management Plan) near Lovells and St. Helen, for example, have had some of the highest densities of nesting Kirtland's warblers ever documented. Plantations in the old Ogemaw Warbler Management Area (about 1,000 acres planted just before the Habitat Management Plan was implemented) have been used by 3, 6 and 13 pairs of Kirtland's warblers in 1988, 1989 and 1990, respectively; and warbler use of this area should increase for several years to come. Plantations on these sites which have not been used by warblers have either been too small in area (less than 80 acres), of the wrong species (red pine) or of low density of jack pine (less than 1,200 trees/acre).

I know I promised a detailed response to your original letter, but I did not realize it would be this lengthy. Unfortunately, even this does not fully address all your questions and concerns. I do hope that we can arrange a informational meeting in the near future as you suggested.

Let me know if you need further information Jim.

Sincerely,



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WILDLIFE DIVISION
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GB:meh

cc: Representative Ralph Ostling
Karl Hosford, Chief, Wildlife Division
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