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## Bird spotted at Yellow Dog Complication for Kennecott?



A Kirtland's Warbler on the Yellow Dog Plains photographed by Scot Stewart on Saturday.

By SCOTT SWANSON, Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — One of the rarest bird species in North America may have migrated to the Yellow Dog Plains in search of suitable nesting sites.

The appearance of a Kirtland's warbler — a federally listed endangered species — could potentially impact the future of a proposed sulfide mine on the plains.

"A couple of birders had seen it and called me up to the Yellow Dog Plains," said Scot Stewart, The Mining Journal's birding columnist. "I had a chance to get up there Saturday and see it and confirm that's what it was."

According to information provided by Stewart, the Kirtland's warbler is a 5.5 inch-bird with a slate gray back and a black-streaked yellow breast. Worldwide, only about 1,400 specimens remain, primarily located in 10 Michigan counties.

In the Upper Peninsula, 18 specimens were counted in 2005, and the birds have been spotted only in Baraga, Marquette, Schoolcraft and Delta

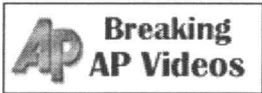
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The birds' rarity is due mostly to their limited habitat, according to Stewart — they only nest in stands of jack pines 5-20 feet tall and 5-20 years old.

If current forest use policies are retained, Stewart said the warbler could possibly thrive on the Yellow Dog Plains.

"It's always exciting seeing these birds showing up in new places, extending their range," he said. "It gives greater hope that they would be able to survive, should something catastrophic happen (to their current habitats)."

A 6,000-acre fire in the Huron National Forest last month may have destroyed nesting habitats for a number of Kirtland's pairs, forcing them to look elsewhere this year, Stewart said.

Kennecott Minerals Co. has proposed building an underground mine on the plains about 10 miles southwest of Big Bay. The company's designs for the mine, known as the "Eagle Project," propose constructing a diagonal, underground shaft that would bore roughly 1,000 feet below the surface to reach an ore body of nickel and copper sulfides.

Project Manager John Cherry said this morning that Kennecott had not yet been made aware of the Kirtland's warbler sighting.

"Obviously we'll have to look into this and see how many there are and where and what this sighting is all about," he said. "Then we'll make the appropriate evaluations on that."

Cynthia Pryor, executive director of the Yellow Dog Plains Watershed Preserve, said her group would work with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to document the sighting of the bird.

Depending on the results, the preserve may look into legal action to protect the potential habitat of the warbler, Pryor said.

"Anytime you get rare and endangered species in that location, things have to be looked at differently," she said.

Earlier this month, an Ingham County Circuit Court Judge ordered the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality to postpone its anticipated decision on a Kennecott Minerals permit application until later this month.

The DEQ, after holding public hearings on the permit, had planned to announce whether it would approve the permit by June 13.

The order postpones that announcement until after the court conducts a June 22 hearing on an appeal filed by the Yellow Dog preserve, the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, four tribal members of the community and the Huron Mountain Club.

The appeal seeks to require the administrative law judge to hold a formal hearing to determine whether Kennecott's permit application is complete and to halt any further processing of the application by the DEQ until the

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