



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Memorandum

To: Field Supervisor, East Lansing Field Office
Attention: Mike DeCapita

From: Field Supervisor, Green Bay Field Office

Subject: 1997 Wisconsin Kirtland's warbler surveys

This memorandum provides results of Kirtland's warbler surveys conducted by Joel Trick of my staff, in northeastern Wisconsin during June and early July of 1997. With guidance from Mike DeCapita of your office, Joel was successful in locating three Kirtland's warblers in an area where they had not previously been observed. The report follows:

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER SURVEYS IN NORTHEASTERN WISCONSIN, 1997

An increasing number of Kirtland's warblers have been observed in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) of Michigan over the last several years, a trend which has been obviously related to population increases on the traditional lower peninsula breeding areas. In light of these recent observations, the potential seemed great for discovery of extralimital birds in Wisconsin in 1997. As there had been no organized survey efforts in Wisconsin since 1991, it seemed likely that other birds could have been present but undiscovered in recent years, a theory supported by the accidental discovery of a bird in Vilas County in 1996. Furthermore, although most past survey efforts and Kirtland's warbler observations have been in western and northwest Wisconsin, it was reasoned that the historic jack pine barrens areas of north central and northeastern Wisconsin held great potential, due to their close proximity to many of the birds observed in the U.P.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) foresters at the Wausaukee Ranger station were contacted and asked to recommend likely jack pine stands for surveys. Foresters were given a brief description of the type of habitat to be identified, and asked to identify potential stands to be surveyed. This resulted in the identification of seven areas of varying sizes within Marinette County which were judged to have potential habitat present. A complete list of those areas is provided in Appendix 1. The sites were all visited on June 18, and 19, 1997. All roads and fire lanes around and within the search areas were traversed, and those sites which appeared to provide suitable habitat were identified for surveys, based upon guidance received from Mike DeCapita.

A total of 16 sites within the potential areas were judged to be suitable habitat, of which 7 were approximately 40 acres or larger. Each of the sites was recorded on a map which is on file in the Green Bay Field Office. Each

area of apparently suitable habitat was checked for singing males between the hours of 6:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M. A tape of a singing Kirtland's warbler was also played in an attempt to elicit a response from territorial males.

At 8:30 A.M. on the morning of June 18, 1997, three singing male Kirtland's warblers were discovered in an approximately 45-acre stand of jack pine within one of the areas identified for surveys in Marinette County, Wisconsin (see Appendix 1). After visually confirming the identification of two of these individuals, the remainder of the potential stands were surveyed during the mornings of June 18th and 19th. Late on the morning of the 19th, a return visit to the site where birds were first observed confirmed that three singing males were still present. The site was again visited on the morning of June 22nd, when two singing birds were present. On that date, Joel and three other carefully selected observers followed the birds throughout their territories at distances between 10 and 30 feet for over an hour, at which time it was determined that neither were banded. Both birds sang almost continuously, and never appeared agitated by human presence, nor were they seen to be tending to a nest or a female. Both birds were observed to capture insects while being observed, which they immediately consumed.

The site was visited by additional single observers on June 24, and 25, 1997, and on both dates two birds were still present and singing. When the site was visited on the morning of the June 28th, no birds were heard or seen between 8:00 A.M. to 10:00 A.M. When the site was again visited on July 1, 1997, one singing male was present; it was seen and heard between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 A.M.

The stand where birds were found is part of a large block of county land, most of which is fairly young jack pine, with some mature stands also present. The occupied site is a planted stand, with numerous small openings within it, and most trees are 8 to 12 feet tall, approximately 20 years of age. Composition is pure jack pine, with an understory of mostly sedges and little bluestem, along with bluegrass, blueberries, bearberry, sand cherry, juneberry, chokecherry, hazel, and New Jersey tea. The site is also rich in native forbs such as phlox, puccoon, and bergamot. Other bird species heard and seen in the area included clay-colored sparrow, Nashville warbler, chipping sparrow, indigo bunting, rufous-sided towhee, brown thrasher, northern harrier.

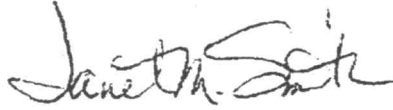
Within the section in which the birds were found, there also were several other favorably appearing stands within 1/4 mile. These were all checked several times on different dates, but no birds were observed there. Another stand which appears ideal is located approximately 4 miles away, but no birds were seen there either.

Two singing males also were discovered in Vilas County on June 19, 1997, by Bill Reardon, U.S. Forest Service. This observation was also reported and confirmed by Jim Baughman, Wisconsin DNR Forester. In an effort to determine whether there were any females present, this site was visited on July 1st, when one singing male was observed. No evidence of a female was seen at that time. According to Jim Baughman, one bird was captured and color-banded by Wes Jones, retired Fish and Wildlife Service employee, on July 3, 1997. Jim also indicated that the bird was still present and singing as of July 6th. This site is a large (approx. 500 acres) stand of pure jack pine on private land. The stand is extremely dense with very few openings; the trees averaged 10 to 15 feet in height, with numerous low, interlocking branches. Further details on this site can probably be obtained from Bill Reardon or Wes Jones.

The limited area survey of northeastern Wisconsin indicates the presence of a minimum of five male Kirtland's warblers in Wisconsin in 1997. We do not rule out the possibility of additional birds being present in the state, but undetected. We hope to organize a more concerted survey effort for 1998, with surveys conducted in suitable habitat throughout the state. We would like to

utilize Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas volunteers, previous Kirtland's warbler survey cooperators, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service personnel to conduct surveys. Likely areas to survey would be identified prior to the time of surveys, ideally before this winter.

Questions pertaining to this report can be directed to Mr. Joel Trick of my staff by calling 414-465-7440.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Janet M. Smith".

Janet M. Smith