

June 23, 2004

Mr. Stevan J. Christiansen, District Ranger  
St. Ignace Ranger District  
Hiawatha National Forest  
St. Ignace, Michigan 49781

RE: Interim Recommendations for the Raco Plains Ecosystem Management Project,  
Hiawatha National Forest, Chippewa County, Michigan

Dear Mr. Christiansen:

We received your June 18, 2004 email notice regarding the June 17, 2004 confirmation of a male Kirtland's warbler (*Dendroica kirtlandii*) in the Raco Plains Ecosystem Management Project Area on the Hiawatha National Forest (HNF). Survey efforts for many years have been unsuccessful in confirming the presence of Kirtland's warblers in the Raco Plains Land Type Association (LTA). This new observation is very encouraging and should stimulate the conservation and recovery of this species on the HNF and in the Upper Peninsula. We understand that you intend to reassess the Raco Plains Project in light of this new information and that in the meantime we will delay concluding the Endangered Species Act (Act) section 7 consultation for the project. This provides us with an opportunity to present you with recommendations for the management of the Kirtland's warbler we hope you will consider in your reassessment.

The jack pine barrens typical of the Raco Plans LTA are considered to be one of the most highly imperiled ecosystems in North America. The Kirtland's warbler is an indicator species for this land type in Michigan and management for the species also addresses the needs of all plants and animals naturally adapted to this ecosystem. As acknowledged in your draft EA for this project, the higher stocking densities and configuration required by the Kirtland's warbler more closely simulates the historical conditions resulting from natural wildfire disturbance in the jack pine ecosystem. Similar management on the Huron-Manistee National Forests has been instrumental in the conservation of the Kirtland's warbler, while still supporting viable commercial timber harvest and other ecosystem values.

Recovery and conservation of the Kirtland's warbler will require significant contributions and efforts by all land owners with potential habitat throughout its range in Michigan. In a January 12, 2002 letter to the Director of Region 3 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team recommended an increase in the amount of habitat to be managed for

Reference

USFWS. 2004. Letter to the Hiawatha and Ottawa National Forests regarding the status of the Canada lynx in the UP. Dated March 22, 2004. 5pp.

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