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Gentlemen:

It would be fruitless in this place to argue the benefit of a fast buck against the loss of a unique form of life forever, but I cannot let pass your editorial comment on the forest fire in the Kirtland's warbler region (Asides, May 8) with the misconceptions it conveys.

First, the fire was not set "to burn off some of the forest," as you say. It was set to burn slashings and brush on cut-over land in order to prepare the soil for a vigorous new growth of pine. Such deliberate burning is widely used in modern forestry.

Second, the fire was not intended to provide "food for the rare Kirtland's warbler." The bird does not eat pine seeds or any other residue of recent fire.

In focusing attention on the "broader question" of the judgment of the National Forest Service and its conservation efforts, you have selected a poor example in the case of the Kirtland's warbler, which actually provides a good illustration of the reconciliation of preservation with commercial use. The steps taken to insure the survival of this bird entail reforestation leading to the ultimate harvest of the pine on each tract.

The loss of one man's life and several cabins in the woods was a tragedy. However, there were four other wildfires set by private citizens on the same day in the same region, any of which by chance could have had similar consequences, but these have attracted little attention and no moralizing.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Mayfield