



KIRTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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NEWS RELEASE

F.Y.I

Subject: Warbler Festival Becomes Region Event

Office: Public Relations

For Release: Tuesday, December 5, 1995 a.m.

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The concept of the Kirtland Warbler Festival as a **regional event** came another step closer to reality Wednesday, November 19.

The consensus of Chamber of Commerce representatives from Roscommon, Ogemaw, Oscoda and Crawford counties and other local, state and federal officials meeting at Kirtland Community College was to expand the Festival from its original base in Oscoda County to a **four-county area** with the College serving as the focal point for the event.

The group also confirmed Saturday and Sunday, **May 18 - 19** as the dates for the expanded Festival, which will coincide with the opening of the Kirtland Warbler Tours conducted by the U. S. Forest Service.

"The scope of the Festival is to be expanded as well," says **Linda Barnes**, Kirtland Consultant, who chaired the meeting, "focusing on the **Jack Pine and AuSable River ecosystems**, with educational programs becoming a central feature of the activities." Kirtland Community College will become a partner with local communities in the four-county area in planning and organizing the Festival. Each community will organize activities within its own area to complement campus based programs.

An action committee is currently being recruited, said Barnes, with representation from Kirtland, COOR area communities, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Natural Resources, Michigan State University Extension Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service which will begin to organize and coordinate the Festival.

"An event like this can be a tremendous boost in tourism and in the area's economy;" said Barnes. "that was proven in Mio." During the past two years, Mio residents have sponsored the

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Festival as a one-day event which brought hundreds of birders and tourists from throughout the United States to the Kirtland Warbler's Jack Pine nesting area. The efforts of the Oscoda group resulted in state and national awards to the community of Mio, including a personal visit by Secretary of the Interior, **Bruce Babbitt**, and a grant for **\$5,000** to help support this year's Festival. Local vendors in the Oscoda area reported a 30% increase in business during the first two years of the Festival. The Festival's success also placed an enormous burden on a small number of volunteers responsible for planning, organizing and overseeing the event and they no longer have the resources to meet its growing demands.

Festival founders **Virgie Purchase** and her son **Wayne**, and **Holly Gomez** from Mio are encouraging the expansion to a four-county event. They said a recent report released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicated that **65 million adults** spend at least **\$5.2 billion** yearly on bird-watching and support at least 200,000 jobs. With the increasing popularity of bird watching, birding festivals have gained in importance as a economic resource for communities.

"We have great resources for making the Festival a 'Celebration of Nature,'" says DNR representative **Bob Hess**. "We have more than 750,000 acres of public land in the four-county area, the Hartwick Pines area, the AuSable River, the Rifle River, the CCC Museum, the Jack Pine system, the dead stream swamp, and so many opportunities for outdoor recreation and natural resource enjoyment and, there are an endless number of ways in which the Festival can introduce these wonders to visitors."

Barnes said the Action Committee's first meeting is set for Thursday, **December 14** at Kirtland Community College. The group is expected to review ideas for a Festival logo and begin organizational planning.

Residents of the COOR area who are interested in submitting ideas for activities for the Festival and who would like to assist in planning and implementing events should call **Jerry Werle**, Public Relations Director, Kirtland Community College, (1-517-275-5121, Ext. 242) or **Sandy Figley**, Administrative Assistant to the President, (Ext. 253).