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## **KIRTLAND'S WARBLERS POPULATION HIGHEST EVER RECORDED**

LANSING--The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service today announced Michigan's 2001 Kirtland's warbler count recorded 1,085 singing males, the highest count since the first census was taken in 1951.

The 2001 count represents an increase of nearly 200 singing males over last year's count of 891. State and federal officials called the count a significant milestone toward the recovery of this federally-endangered species.

"This is a tremendous achievement," stated Mike Decapita, USFWS biologist. "It wasn't that long ago in 1987 that we had a low population count of only 167 singing males." The lowest numbers were counted in 1974 and 1987, when only 167 singing males were found.

The census has been performed annually since 1971. The birds are counted by biologists, researchers and volunteers on state, federal and private lands by listening for their songs. The songs can be heard more than one-quarter mile away, providing an accurate method to census the birds with minimum disturbance. Since only males sing, the minimum breeding population (males & females) is calculated as twice the count of singing males.

"The Kirtland's warbler management program represents the best of scientific wildlife management at work," said Pat Lederle, Endangered Species Program Coordinator for the DNR. "The cooperation

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among DNR biologists and foresters, U.S. Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Military Affairs in managing the jack pine barrens for warblers' nesting habitat is outstanding.”

In addition to providing warbler habitat and forest products, the jack pine system provides valuable habitat for a variety of plant species, songbirds and game animals.

Maintaining the jack pine barrens is essential because Kirtland's warbler numbers are directly related to the amount of available nesting habitat. The Kirtland's warbler nests have been found only in jack pine stands located in northern Michigan. The warbler is a ground nester and selects stands of trees about 4 to 20 years old with live branches that extend to the ground. Historically, these stands of young jack pine were created by natural wildfires that frequently swept through northern Michigan. Modern fire suppression programs altered this natural process, reducing Kirtland's warbler habitat.

To mimic the affects of wildfire, state and federal wildlife biologists and foresters now conduct a combination of clearcutting, burning, seeding and replanting on about 150,000 acres. Only through continuation of these activities can the bird's survival into the future be ensured. At least 1,500 acres of jack pine trees were seeded on state and federal lands this spring, and 1,000 additional acres will be planted this fall. These new plantations will provide habitat for warblers in six to 10 years.

The number of singing males found in 9 northern Lower Peninsula counties were: Alcona 132, Clare 11, Crawford 266, Iosco 50, Kalkaska 20, Ogemaw 385, Oscoda 190, Otsego 9, and Roscommon 14. A total of 8 singing males were found in three Upper Peninsula counties: Delta 4, Marquette 2 and Schoolcraft 2. Females were observed with the males, indicating continuing nesting activity in the Upper Peninsula. The production of young has been confirmed in the Upper Peninsula each year since 1996. No singing males have been reported this year in Wisconsin or Ontario.

For more information on the Kirtland's warbler, contact the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Bureau, Natural Heritage Program, Box 30180, Lansing, MI 48909-7680.