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BRIEFING STATEMENT

Prepared for: Secretary Babbitt
Submitted: June 7, 1994

STATE: Michigan

TITLE: Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Program

ISSUE: The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team has initiated efforts to improve public awareness and support for essential management.

STATUS:

- o New initiatives beginning in Mio, Michigan, on June 11, 1994, include the 1st annual Kirtland's Warbler Festival sponsored by the Oscoda County Chamber of Commerce, and a self guided Jack Pine Auto Tour, a multi-partner project directed toward public education and tourism.
- o Support is growing from local residents and business interests who are recognizing the tourism values of this bird and other jack pine ecosystem species. About 1,500 people come annually from across the U.S. and foreign countries to participate in tours to see the warbler. The Holiday Inn in Grayling has provided space for a Service public warbler viewing tour since 1992.
- o This recovery program is one of the oldest multi-agency endangered species recovery efforts in the nation. Kirtland's warbler census efforts began in 1951. The census has continued on an annual basis since 1971. Dedicated habitat management units were first set aside by Michigan and the U. S. Forest Service in the 1960's.
- o The population of Kirtland's warbler is at its highest level in three decades (970 adults), due largely to habitat produced by the 1980 Mack Lake wildfire. Projections of future suitable habitat show that this increase is temporary. The warbler nests only in 6 to 22 year old stands of jack pine. Suppression of wildfires means that the species is dependent on jack pine regeneration programs of the three land management agencies.
- o Direct responsibility for habitat management rests with the U. S. Forest Service and Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), and the Service (Seney NWR). The recovery plan requires that 2,200 to 2,800 acres of new jack pine habitat be developed annually.
- o Human-caused forest fragmentation allowed the expansion of cowbirds into north Michigan. Kirtland's warbler has no natural defense against cowbird nest parasitism. Prior to cowbird control, nest parasitism occurred at 70% of warbler nests. The warbler would become extinct within 20 years if cowbird control were ended, or within 75 years if halved.

FUTURE NEEDS:

- o Kirtland's warbler will always need protection from cowbird parasitism and artificial production of jack pine habitat. Funding for cowbird control, a direct Service responsibility, has been recently improved (\$100,000 in FY 1994), but must be maintained in real dollars.
- o Comprehensive funding needed by the three agencies for warbler habitat management is \$880,000 to \$1,120,000, at a cost of \$400 per acre. This level of funding has never been available, and funding now appears to be declining from recent levels.
- o The State of Michigan receives partial support for its habitat management through Section 6 Endangered Species Act grant funding. Section 6 funds available in FY 1994 were 25 percent less than in previous years. This \$130,000 grant was 43 percent of the total needed by the MDNR.
- o The Forest Service is also experiencing difficulty sustaining funding for warbler management.
- o Any break in funding for these activities, even for one year, will lead to population declines, and possibly extinction. Comprehensive funding for agency habitat management for this species should be considered as a single package at the Congressional level.

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