



Kirtland's Warbler: A Success Story of Cooperative Conservation on Saving an Endangered Species

Project # 10-119

Background:

The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team (KWRT) was the first recovery team appointed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the 1973 Endangered Species Act. The team membership was carefully chosen to represent the three managing agencies (Michigan Department of Natural Resources [DNR], U.S. Forest Service and USFWS) involved in the recovery activities for the species. Team members made key decisions that put the recovery program on the path towards de-listing despite the species' complete reliance on continued conservation efforts. The KWRT also learned some valuable lessons throughout the process. For example, the early relationship with Camp Grayling was rather contentious until the Camp Grayling Environmental Manager was included as an "ex officio" member of the team. This simple measure opened communication and allowed constructive talks to resolve land use conflicts to begin. Two key agreements between the National Guard and Michigan DNR ultimately paved the way for an enduring partnership of trust and mutually beneficial resource management. In addition, the recovery team learned a hard lesson about public education to inform the public about their early succession habitat management program. Today, the team is partnered with Kirtland Community College to host the annual Kirtland's Warbler Wildlife Festival that educates both local and out-of-state people about the benefits of Kirtland's Warbler management and other wildlife programs. In addition, a partnership with the Bahamian government helped engender support for recovery efforts on the wintering grounds. After 30 years of lessons learned, the KWRT has successfully brought the Kirtland's Warbler to biological recovery, and have partnered with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to develop a new public/private partnership and to establish a trust fund to ensure permanent funding for management and conservation actions secured even after delisting.

Objective:

The objectives of this Legacy-funded project were to:

- (1) Document the development of the Kirtland's Warbler recovery process and the history of the KWRT, and
- (2) Create a permanent records archive.

Summary of Approach:

There is no permanent record of the KWRT decision-making process to which other programs can refer. The institutional knowledge of the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Program is in the minds and files of current and former KWRT members, some of which are now retired or deceased. The project objective was accomplished by interviewing the remaining surviving early team members and early partners, to gather the papers, pictures, stories and videos that document the history of the team's recovery planning process, and to summarize and archive these items to share with the conservation community.

Benefit:

The process of this recovery team provides a critical model for how to protect military training while responsibly managing natural resources. Through the hard work of several people, broken relationships were mended, trust was built, and actions taken to further the goals of both sides. Powerful partnerships have resulted, creating a safe haven for military training and for the rebound of a protected species. Other installations can learn from the successes and lessons learned of this process and provide protection for training in other sites with endangered species. The KWRT also successfully dealt with the unique challenges of a conservation-reliant species, which will assist DoD in its future dealings with a multitude of conservation-reliant species.

Accomplishments:

A monograph has been written and will be submitted for publishing (e.g., Ornithological Monographs) after the approval comes from Legacy. 15+ gigabytes of data, records, communications and research have been electronically archived and housed at the Kirtland Community College, and will be submitted to the Legacy Program, as well. This information also has an index database. An historic, long-term accomplishment in the conservation of endangered species has been documented, and saved for later conservationists to call upon for further work on the Kirtland's Warbler as well as other conservation-reliant species.

Contact Information:

Michele Richards, Natural Resources Specialist
Michigan Army National Guard
2510 26th St, Bldg 2510, Augusta, MI 49012
517.243.0788, Fax: 269.731.6572
Email: Michele.richards@us.army.mil

