Threatened and Endangered Species in Forests of Wisconsin

This publication was produced in 2000 as a joint project of:
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources - Division of Forestry and the Bureau of Endangered Resources,
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
The Nature Conservancy,
International Paper,
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and reference publication number FR-174

WISCONSIN
DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

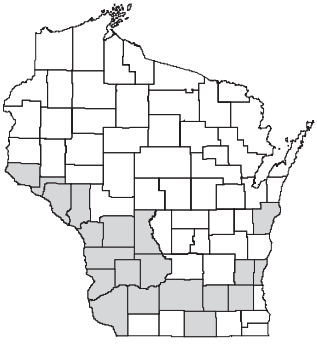
Kentucky Warbler

(Oporornis formosus)

Federal Status: Not Listed
State Status: Threatened

Description: The Kentucky warbler is an insectivorous, ground-nesting bird, slightly more than 5 inches long. The adult male has olive-green upper parts, bright yellow underparts. It has a distinctive black "mask" across its forehead, crown and side of head. It has no wing bars or tail spots. The adult female is similar to the male, but the black on the head is usually reduced or a mottled gray-olive. Immature birds are similar to adults, but duller in color.

Habitat: During the nesting season, Kentucky warblers prefer large (>200 acres) mature (>50 years old) bottomland hardwood forests. They thrive in a relatively dense understory with such plants as red maple, American hornbeam and

wild grape. Other preferred habitat features include a stream or river, a rich plant community, an abundance and high density of invertebrates associated with moist soils and leaf litter. The Kentucky warbler's nest is well-concealed and located close to the ground. However, it may be built up to 3 feet above the ground in brush or shrubs. The nest consists of an open cup of grasses lined with rootlets and grass.

Forestry Considerations: In general, forest management practices that promote dense understory and well-developed ground cover in Wisconsin's floodplain forests will benefit this rare neotropical migrant. Where this species is known to occur, disturbance, including tree harvest, should be limited during the May 15 to July nesting season. Small (less than 1 acre, ideally less than 1/4 acre), group-selection silviculture would benefit this warbler by providing understory growth while maintaining sufficient canopy closure.