



Greetings from the Black River State Forest! Several years ago I worked for the University of Minnesota. One spring a species of bird was sighted that had not been seen in Minnesota for 70 years. It was reported at a research station one hour north of the Twin Cities. The next weekend I happened to drive to this area and was shocked by what I saw. All along the property were hundreds of cars with people standing nearby with binoculars hoping to catch a glimpse of this bird. I would have never guessed a bird sighting would attract this much interest.

Just a few years ago another rare bird created a similar stir. Great gray owls descended to Minnesota and Wisconsin in numbers never seen before. The great gray is the largest North American owl and typically found in northern Canada and Alaska. Its rare appearance so far south attracted people from all over the United States.

A similar event could be coming to this area and the Black River State Forest. Kirtland's Warblers, one of North America's rarest birds, were recently observed nesting in central Wisconsin. These are the first confirmed breeding pairs found in the state. Previously the bird has only been found in Michigan. In past years only singing males have been observed in Wisconsin.

The Kirtland's Warbler is only one of many rare species found in this area. The combination of large publicly owned landscapes and relative lack of development are important contributors to this rich biological diversity. Another important factor is our central location. The Black River area lies in what is called the Curtis Tension Zone. A rich biological area where communities found in northern Wisconsin intermingle with those typically found in the southern half of the state.

With nature based tourism, sometimes referred to as eco-tourism, a growing industry I think the Black River area has much to offer. Many of the best examples of rare communities such as White Pine – Red Maple swamps or the globally imperiled Pine Barrens are found right in the confines of the State Forest. These communities and others in turn support many rare plants and animals such as the Kirtland, Karner Blue Butterfly, and red shouldered hawk to name just a very few.

If you would like to learn more about the diversity that can be found in the State Forest there are two naturalist events this July. On July 7th there will be a guided walk at the Pigeon Creek Nature Trail. The walk begins at 9:30 and is one hour in length. On July 21st Armand Bartz, DNR Ecologist, will lead a guided walk through the State Natural Area at Castle Mound. The event begins at 10:00 and is one hour in length.

There is no charge for either event although a state parks and forests vehicle permit is required. A one hour permit is \$3.00. To attend these events please register by calling Katie at (715) 284-1484.