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## **National Innovation Grant Funds Community Outreach Initiative in the Agua Fria River Watershed**

*Audubon/Toyota Support Aims to Develop a Shared Vision for Long Term Health of the River*

One of 48 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national innovation grants will enable Sonoran Audubon Society and the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership to launch “Community Conversations”, a planning initiative to bring together diverse groups, businesses and individuals to develop a shared plan for a healthy future of the Agua Fria River Watershed.

The Agua Fria River Watershed is an extremely important water resource to the people, businesses, wildlife and quality of life in Yavapai County, central Arizona. The Watershed includes important cultural sites, historic places and gorgeous vistas. It is home to pronghorn antelope on the upland mesas, as well as many birds which reside in or migrate through the Watershed’s diverse lowland habitats and riparian (riverside) areas. The river’s water flows through the Agua Fria National Monument on the East side of Route 17 and into Lake Pleasant providing a clean water resource for the urban areas of the Central Deserts.

The \$5,000 planning grant will help Sonoran Audubon Society and the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership to encourage residents of Yavapai County to envision a healthy Agua Fria River in the future, and then help to create projects which support that goal.

“This funding will enable local community members to discuss what the river means to them and their families,” said Karen LaFrance, Vice President of Sonoran Audubon Society, and project manager. “We believe inviting community residents to become directly involved will generate strong alliances in the communities most affected and will result in excellent conservation projects in the Watershed. Our members benefit because they enjoy the birds and they realize that that enjoyment depends upon supporting the long term health of the river. Sonoran Audubon is pleased to support community stewardship of this important river system in Central Arizona.”

“The Agua Fria River is the most precious resource our community has for its long term health and quality of life,” said Cliff Hersted, a longtime resident of Arcosanti and member of the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership. “As the climate becomes drier here in Yavapai County, we must protect the Agua Fria River Watershed for critical multiple water uses--to preserve high quality water for drinking, to support our business community, to enrich recreation opportunities and to preserve natural habitat for future generations. We support Community Conversations about how to maintain and support a healthy river and look forward to working with our neighbors and friends to develop a plan and to form groups to implement improvements.”

The central Arizona innovation grant is part of \$1.1 million awarded by the *TogetherGreen* initiative this year. Audubon and Toyota launched the five-year *TogetherGreen* initiative in 2008 to fund conservation projects, train environmental leaders, and offer volunteer opportunities that significantly benefit the environment. Grantees were selected from scores of applicants across America. Funds were awarded to

Audubon organizations that demonstrated exceptional innovation in working with other groups on projects that will produce tangible benefits for environmental quality.

The Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership is a monthly gathering of individuals, state, local and federal agencies, ranchers, local residents and community-based nonprofit groups with interest in the Agua Fria River as a high quality clean water resource. Recognizing how fragile the Agua Fria River is, the Partnership members have a keen interest in community planning and developing local stewardship of the river.

Sonoran Audubon Society, a nonprofit based in Glendale, has an interest in the Agua Fria River for its bird habitat. The group, affiliated with the National Audubon Society, monitors bird populations in “Important Bird Areas” along the river in the Agua Fria National Monument. Participation in the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership along with its local funding partner the Arizona Game and Fish Department signifies its serious interest in the health of the river.

“The real innovation here is including all members of a community in conservation planning efforts, and we’re excited to be able to support it,” said *TogetherGreen* Project Manager Judy Braus.

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#### **About *TogetherGreen***

Audubon and Toyota launched the five-year *TogetherGreen* initiative in 2008 to build the promise of a greener, healthier future through innovation, leadership and volunteerism. Nearly 90 projects totaling more than \$2.5 million have received Innovation Grants to protect land, water, and energy resources nationwide. For more information, visit [www.togethergreen.org](http://www.togethergreen.org).

#### **About Audubon**

Now in its second century, Audubon connects people with birds, nature and the environment that supports us all. Our national network of community-based nature centers, chapters, scientific, education, and advocacy programs engages millions of people from all walks of life in conservation action to protect and restore the natural world. To learn about Audubon’s nationwide efforts to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, visit [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)

#### **About Toyota**

Toyota (NYSE: TM) established operations in the United States in 1957 and currently operates 10 manufacturing plants. Toyota is committed to being a good corporate citizen in the communities where it does business and believes in supporting programs with long-term sustainable results. Toyota supports numerous organizations across the country, focusing on education, the environment and safety. Since 1991, Toyota has contributed more than \$464 million to philanthropic programs in the U.S. For more information on Toyota’s commitment to improving communities nationwide, visit [www.toyota.com/community](http://www.toyota.com/community).