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## **National Innovation Grant Funds Arizona Conservation Quests**

*Support Will Establish a Network of Fun Nature-Based Treasure Hunts in Arizona*

One of 48 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national innovation grants will enable Audubon Arizona to engage the local community in learning about imperiled habitats and other natural resources through fun, community-wide treasure hunts.

Arizona's rapidly growing population has put pressure on riparian habitats, the plant communities that support woody vegetation found along rivers, creeks and streams. For years, the land along the Salt River has been neglected and now, though in the process of being restored to serve its biological function, it continues to be overlooked. By combining exploration activities with environmental education, Audubon Arizona will help connect the community to this restored river as well as to other locations state wide.

The \$16,000 grant will power the partnership between Audubon Arizona, Be Outdoors Arizona, the Arizona Association for Environmental Education, and Poetics of Place to create a vibrant questing community in Arizona. To launch this process, the Nina Mason Pulliam Rio Salado Audubon Center will host a two-day workshop at which participants will learn how to create Conservation Quests. A total of 10 or more Quests will then be collected in paper and online formats. Community members will then be encouraged to visit all the Quest sites and to rank their experiences. "Questers" will also be invited to assist with habitat restoration projects and other volunteer opportunities at the Quest sites.

"The Nature Quest program provides a great opportunity for families to get outside together and learn about Arizona's unique natural features in fun and interactive ways," said Cathy Wise, Audubon Arizona Education Director "Many Questers will be new to outdoor experiences and will likely want to help preserve and protect Arizona's special places through community action. We look forward to facilitating this by offering volunteer conservation projects," adds Wise.

Questing participants will be encouraged to complete multiple quests, thereby exploring several natural areas. Questers completing 5 or more quests will receive a prize!

"Be Outdoors Arizona (BOAZ) is a nonprofit organization that is committed to ensuring children have the opportunity for continuous outdoor experiences while building community stewardship skills. We are thrilled to partner with Audubon to bring Nature Quests to Arizona," said Jeff Williamson, president of the Arizona Zoological Society and spokesman for Be Outdoors Arizona.

In addition, the Arizona Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) supports the Conservation Quest program. AAEE's mission is to enhance the quality, scope, and effectiveness of environmental education for Arizona's diverse audiences.

The Audubon 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.

“This program is a wonderful opportunity for creating a generation of environmental leaders in Arizona through fun activities that make nature accessible,” said *TogetherGreen* Program 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 dollars 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).