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***TogetherGreen* Awards Innovation Grant to Energize Mendocino Community to Save Shorebirds**

Volunteers Will Increase Bird Populations, Educate Fellow Beachgoers

One of 41 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national Innovation Grants will mobilize volunteers to work toward a five percent increase in the populations of MacKerricher State Park's Watchlisted bird species—including the American Golden-Plover, Black Turnstone, and Red Knot, among others. Not only that, the Save Our Shorebirds project will begin a dialogue about shorebird conservation, launching plans and action to strength the birds' prospects for survival using engagement of the remote Northern California coastal community.

A \$15,700 grant will allow Mendocino Coast Audubon Society and California State Parks to protect shorebirds through a combination of education and hands-on efforts to safeguard threatened habitat at the Important Bird Areas of Virgin Creek and Ten Mile Beaches within MacKerricher State Park. Specific actions include:

- Performing shorebird censuses and sharing that data with State Parks and U.S. Fish and Wildlife as well as schools and libraries;
- Removing invasive plants with the help of State Parks crews (shorebirds depend on native vegetation for survival);
- Creating a children's booklet, illustrated by Mendocino County students;
- Launching a Junior Ranger shorebird appreciation program at MacKerricher State Park, directed by State Parks Interpretive Rangers, to engage children in conservation efforts;
- Providing career and research opportunities for a College of the Redwoods science student.

MacKerricher State Park contains critical habitat for imperiled shorebird species such as the Western Snowy Plover—habitat that has been degraded by invasive non-native plants and human disturbances caused by unleashed dogs, careless horse riders, illegal off-road vehicles and vandalism of nesting sites. Communication is hugely important in reducing conflicts between shorebirds and beachgoers, and by reaching even a portion of the coast's 8,000 year-round residents, huge strides forward will have been made for conservation.

“Working to help beachgoers understand shorebirds will help decrease disturbances and increase shorebird nesting, and we are able to help achieve this because of the help of our partners,” said David Jensen, president of the Mendocino Coast Audubon Society.

“This area has changed dramatically. It has shed a logging image and entered the 21st century as a tourist destination. People come here to enjoy wine, water and wildlife—and we are less than a half tank of gas away from the San Francisco Bay Area,” Jensen added.

More than 1,000,000 tourists visited MacKerricher State Park last year.

“Our hands-on advocacy will make a difference for these threatened bird populations—and help our visitors enjoy our wildlife,” said Angela Liebenberg, Environmental Scientist for the State Parks of Mendocino Coast and director of Save Our Shorebirds research volunteers.

The Save Our Shorebirds grant is part of the first \$1.4 million awarded by *TogetherGreen*. Announced in spring, 2008, the initiative is a dynamic and innovative national Audubon program funded by Toyota that aims to provide inspiration, leadership, and opportunities for people to take action at home, in their communities and beyond to improve the health of our environment. Grantees were selected from scores of applicants across America. Funds were awarded to local Audubon programs and chapters that demonstrated exceptional innovation in working with other groups on projects that will produce tangible benefits for environmental quality.

“Community members absolutely need to be engaged if we’re going to see any real wildlife conservation progress, and we’re glad to be able to help these groups achieve that,” said *TogetherGreen* Project Manager Judy Braus.

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TogetherGreen will invest in both promising environmental projects and outstanding leaders that can shape a brighter tomorrow. Along with Innovation Grants to be awarded each year, *TogetherGreen* funds and promotes conservation leadership training and volunteer programs designed to equip and engage diverse groups and individuals to take action today to shape a healthier tomorrow. Information on other grantees, along with opportunities to get involved in conservation efforts, showcase successful initiatives, and honor those who are making a difference, can be found at www.TogetherGreen.org.

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.

Toyota (NYSE: TM) established operations in the United States in 1957 and currently operates 10 manufacturing plants, with another under construction in Mississippi. 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. Through its corporate initiatives, manufacturing operations and philanthropy, Toyota supports numerous organizations across the country, focusing on education, the environment and safety. In 2007, Toyota contributed more than \$56 million to philanthropic programs in the U.S. For more information on Toyota's commitment to improving communities nationwide, visit www.toyota.com/community.