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## **National Innovation Grant Supports Volunteer Efforts to Protect and Monitor Raritan Wetlands**

*Support Will Bring Community Collaboration to Wetlands through Events, Education and Outreach*

One of 48 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national innovation grants will enable the New Jersey Society to inspire New Jerseyites of all ages to get involved in wetland conservation. The focus will be on conserving the Raritan River Watershed, which encompasses 1,100 square miles of land and is the largest river basin located entirely within the State of New Jersey.

New Jersey is the most densely populated state in the nation, and the Raritan River Watershed includes portions of seven counties and 100 municipalities and supports a population of approximately 1.2 million people. However, its metropolitan areas contain many patches of open space centered on wetlands that support a surprising array of plant and animal biodiversity, which are threatened by development, pollution, human encroachment and invasive species.

The \$4,783 grant will help New Jersey Audubon Society develop a community-based conservation initiative to involve local residents, schools and community organizations in assessing, monitoring and ultimately enhancing biodiversity in urban wetlands. Collaboration with community members and local environmental groups will help restore and improve the quality of existing urban habitats that have been degraded, as well as providing a better understanding of these natural systems.

“Through this project, we will involve local residents, schools and community organizations in assessing, monitoring and ultimately enhancing biodiversity in urban wetlands,” said Nellie Tsipoura, Director of Citizen Science of the New Jersey Audubon Society.

The goal of this project is to create a working model of citizen engagement that can be effectively implemented through various watersheds in New Jersey. Through volunteer events and educational outreach, New Jersey Audubon Society and its alliance are helping urban residents to contribute significantly to helping the environment.

The New Jersey Audubon Society 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 real innovation here is taking action to involve all community members in exploring and restoring the Raritan wetlands, 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).