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National Innovation Grant Funds Blair Woods Wetlands Volunteer Project

Small Grant Aims for Big Conservation Results at Blair Woods Sanctuary

One of 48 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national innovation grants will enable the Travis Audubon Society to build on its restoration work underway at the Blair Woods sanctuary to carry out another productive year of removing invasive plants, planting native plant species, building trails, restoring the pond, and removing trash.

Blair Woods is a ten acre wooded wetland in the heart of highly urbanized Austin Texas. It is located on a tributary of the Fort Branch Creek, which eventually makes its way to the Colorado River, and serves as an important “upstream” biological filtering system. The wetland, however, has suffered many years of neglect and as a result, invasive plants have run wild and proliferated. Travis Audubon Society wants to put an end to that and enlist the local community to play a hands-on role in the restoration.

With a \$15,000 grant, Travis Audubon will engage local schools, youth groups, and families from the surrounding predominantly Hispanic and African-American neighborhoods to encourage participation in habitat restoration efforts and to decrease pollution from garbage and urban runoff. The goal is to restore another 500 feet of riparian and pond habitat that serves as wildlife refuge for birds, amphibians and other animals.

“We are excited to have our neighbors join us in enhancing and preserving this sanctuary.” said Nancy Manning, Executive Director, Travis Audubon. Ultimately, we hope to offer the sanctuary for educational and fun family programs for east Austin residents.

The Blair Woods Wetlands Project aims to provide volunteers with the skills and experience to make more informed decisions at home and in their communities.

In 2008, *TogetherGreen* funding supported the work of 150 volunteers who restored 135 square yards of habitat and created two walking trails around the pond at Blair Woods. This year, in addition to the \$15,000 Innovation grant, Travis Audubon received an additional \$7,000 grant from *TogetherGreen* Volunteer Days program to continue the removal of non-native plants, planting of native plants and trail building and maintenance.

The Austin-area 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.

“Community members need to be engaged if we’re going to see any real conservation progress, and we’re glad to expand support to Travis Audubon to help them achieve that,” 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 dollars have received Innovation Grants to protect land, water, and energy resources nationwide. For more information, visit 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

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.