



Embargoed for Release:
December 9, 2010

Contact:
Elizabeth Sorrell (212) 979-3185 / esorrell@audubon.org
Lill Erickson (406) 222-0730 / lerickson@wsestaff.org

National Innovation Grant Helps Ranchers Produce Beef and Wildlife-Friendly Habitat

Funding Will Help Connect Wildlife-Conscious Consumers with Sustainably Ranched Beef

December 9, New York, NY – Montana Audubon and Western Sustainability Exchange are taking an innovative approach to helping ranchers steward their land, and connecting them with consumers willing to pay for beef raised more sustainably. For their collaborative effort, they are receiving a \$25,000 *TogetherGreen* Innovation Grant.

As more people are making food choices based on environmental impact, some ranchers in Montana are figuring out ways to manage their land so that they can produce beef while also protecting highly important ecosystems and the animals that depend on them. Montana Audubon and Western Sustainability Exchange will use their grant to document the practices required to successfully manage rangeland for wildlife, to encourage ranchers to adopt those practices, and to promote the value of paying a little more for beef grown on such ranches to consumers.

Partners Montana Audubon and Western Sustainability Exchange are one of 43 award winners across the country that will use *TogetherGreen* funding to achieve conservation results and engage more people in conservation.

“The conservation solutions pioneered by *TogetherGreen* Innovation Grant winners are inspiring models of both ingenuity and conservation commitment,” said Audubon President David Yarnold. “Each project represents an investment in our shared environment and future – and an opportunity for many of our nation’s most creative and dedicated individuals and communities to transform their dreams into effective conservation action. As our alliance with Toyota shows, when organizations work together, they can magnify conservation results.”

Montana is home to diverse ecosystems that include sage steppe (a dry habitat made up of sagebrush and other shrubs and short grasses), which is vital for the survival of both the highly threatened Greater Sage Grouse and Brewer’s Sparrow. Montana’s riparian cottonwood-willow forest covers only one percent of the state’s landscape but provides breeding habitat for more than half of the state’s nesting birds. Currently, both ecosystems are threatened by inappropriate livestock grazing.

“Federal funding to protect diverse ecosystems is increasingly difficult to obtain. Appropriately managed grazing can improve and protect those habitats. Conservationists now have a new tool to protect endangered species by investing in sustainably raised beef,” according to Steve Hoffman, executive director, Montana Audubon.

Montana Audubon and Western Sustainability Exchange are currently working with J Bar L Ranch, which has already developed management and grazing practices that are so beneficial that their land harbors a greater diversity of plants than can be found on the adjacent wildlife refuge. Over the course of

the year, with the help of their Innovation Grant, Montana Audubon and Western Sustainability Exchange will employ marketing and education efforts to encourage customers to pay a premium for the ranch's beef. Ultimately they aim to persuade many more ranchers to adopt similar practices on their own properties.

The Montana Innovation Grant is part of nearly \$1.1 million awarded by the *TogetherGreen* initiative this year. Audubon and Toyota launched the five-year *TogetherGreen* initiative in 2008 to fund innovative conservation projects, support conservation leadership, and offer volunteer opportunities that significantly benefit the environment and reach new audiences. Funds were awarded to Audubon organizations and their partners that demonstrated exceptional creativity in working with other groups on projects that will produce tangible benefits for environmental quality.

For complete details about the 2010 *TogetherGreen* Innovation Grants projects, please visit: www.togethergreen.org/grants.

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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. Over 130 projects totaling more than \$3.5 million 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. Visit Audubon online at www.audubon.org.

About Toyota

Toyota (NYSE: TM) established operations in the United States in 1957 and currently operates 10 manufacturing plants, including one under construction. Toyota directly employs nearly 30,000 in the U.S. and its investment here is currently valued at more than \$18 billion, including sales and manufacturing operations, research and development, financial services and design.

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 \$500 million to philanthropic programs in the U.S.

For more information on Toyota's commitment to improving communities nationwide, visit <http://www.toyota.com/community>.