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## 15 State Communities Win Recognition as Nation's First “Bird Cities”

*Innovation Grant Helps Reward Communities That Create Healthy Habitat for Birds and People*

The Bird City Wisconsin project announced today that it was recognizing 15 communities in the state for their efforts to make their communities a better place for birds and other wildlife.

Simultaneously, it was announced that the Milwaukee Audubon Society, which is partnering with nine Wisconsin conservation organizations to take an innovative, collaborative approach to conservation, is receiving a \$31,700 *TogetherGreen* Innovation Grant to expand the Bird City project.

The Bird City Wisconsin partnership is one of 43 award winners across the country that will use *TogetherGreen* funding to achieve conservation results and engage more people in conservation. Milwaukee Audubon Society's grant will reward towns, villages, cities and counties across Wisconsin that create healthier habitats for birds and people by awarding them “Bird City” status.

The inaugural group of Bird Cities includes a wide range of communities statewide: the cities of Mequon, Stevens Point, Green Bay, Muskego, Oshkosh, New London, Lake Geneva, Brookfield and River Falls; the villages of Bayside, Chenequa, Hales Corners and Williams Bay; the Town of Manitowish Waters and Ozaukee County.

Many of those communities are planning their own local events to accept the special Bird City Wisconsin plaque, flag and street signs that will be installed at their boundaries. The Bird City logo was designed by Wisconsin's nationally-known landscape painter Tom Uttech and his wife, designer Mary Uttech.

Communities in Wisconsin that document how they improve bird habitat, manage woodlands, limit hazards to birds, and educate their citizens about birds and environmental health can apply for annual public recognition of their efforts. Bird City Wisconsin spent the past year developing the idea for the program using money from a *TogetherGreen* planning grant; with a \$31,700 *TogetherGreen* Innovation Grant, the Milwaukee Audubon Society and its partner organizations will be able to reach many other communities in the year ahead.

Noel Cutright, a member of the Bird City Steering Committee who championed the recognition plan for nearly a decade, voiced great satisfaction at the announcement, saying: "The incubation time for a good idea can be long and trying, but when it finally hatches and then fledges, real satisfaction is felt."

Modeled on the “Tree City USA” program, Bird City Wisconsin developed 22 criteria across five categories, including habitat creation and protection, community forest management, limiting hazards, public education, and recognizing International Migratory Bird Day. If a community meets at least seven criteria, it becomes an official “Bird City,” receiving two street signs, a flag and plaque, and publicity to recognize its efforts.

“Recognition as a Bird City will be a feather in the cap of any Wisconsin community,” said Andrew Struck, president of the Milwaukee Audubon Society. “This unique program is not only recognizing existing efforts but is building partnerships among local governments, community groups and conservation groups that will spur other cities, counties, towns and villages to adopt the best practices we will spotlight,” added Struck, who also is director of the Ozaukee County Planning and Parks Department.

Struck also said the project's web site, [www.birdcitywisconsin.org](http://www.birdcitywisconsin.org), was playing a critical role in sharing and implementing new conservation strategies.

In addition to [Milwaukee Audubon](#), the Bird City partnership includes the [Wisconsin Society for Ornithology](#), [Madison Audubon Society](#), [Wisconsin Audubon Council](#), [Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin](#), [Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative](#), [Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin](#), [Friends of the Mead/McMillan Association](#), [Riveredge Bird Club](#), and [Aldo Leopold Audubon Society](#).

“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.”

Several other communities across Wisconsin have told the Bird City team that they also are working to meet the program’s criteria, and Bird City is currently accepting applications for a second round of awards to be made in time for International Migratory Bird Day next spring.

The Bird City Wisconsin 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](http://www.togethergreen.org/grants).

#### **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](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. Visit Audubon online at [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, 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>.