

## National Innovation Grant to Keep West Virginia's Important Elk Headwaters Flowing

### *Stakeholder-driven Plan Protects and Improves Water Quality Through Community Involvement*

One of 41 newly-announced *TogetherGreen* national Innovation Grants will protect the ecologically- and economically-important Elk Headwaters through a plan actively developed by farmers, loggers, developers and other stakeholders. By bringing together West Virginians to act as environmental advocates, residents will be able to gain a new appreciation of how the watershed's unique ecosystem benefits wildlife and the economy.

A \$10,000 grant will fund the research, policy and management recommendations of a Comprehensive Watershed Plan, developed through the joint efforts of the Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society, the Elk Headwaters Watershed Association, Downstream Strategies, the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection, the Pocahontas County Commission, and other groups. The plan will include an analysis of available scientific data to help stakeholders decide how to go forward in achieving economic and environmental health for the headwaters. Linking the area's economic potential with community engagement shows that everyone can get involved in making an environmental difference—not just traditional conservationists.

The fragile Elk River watershed, located atop karst geology, supports three kinds of reproducing trout, diverse species of breeding birds, and an endemic crayfish as well as Snowshoe Mountain, a ski and year round resort that attracts thousands of tourists. The highlands provide habitat for at least 115 breeding bird species, 14 of which are tracked as rare by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources. But recent uncontrolled development has threatened the survival of these important habitats, as well as threatening to degrade the area's future economic potential. The Comprehensive Watershed Plan will bring farmers, loggers, developers, scientists and conservationists together to develop and implement a common vision for a greener future.

"This will be the first watershed plan in West Virginia that focuses on preserving a healthy watershed, and does so by pairing local economic development with enhancing the watershed, not degrading it," said Susan Olcott, Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society President.

"By directly including all stakeholders in the planning process, we hope to create a model that isn't successful only for the Elk Headwaters, but in other rural communities in West Virginia," said George Bell, President of the Elk Headwaters Watershed Association.

The Elk Headwaters grant is part of the first \$1.4 million awarded by the *TogetherGreen*. Announced on March 26, 2008, the *TogetherGreen* initiative is a dynamic and innovative national Audubon program funded by Toyota that aims to provide inspiration, leadership, and opportunities that inspire people everywhere 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 Audubon organizations that demonstrated exceptional innovation in working with other groups on projects that will produce tangible benefits for environmental quality.

"There's a real need for watershed protection and preservation in rural areas, and we're happy to be giving these groups the help they need to 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](http://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](http://www.toyota.com/community).