Toyota and Environmental Leaders Work to Expand Pollinator Habitats

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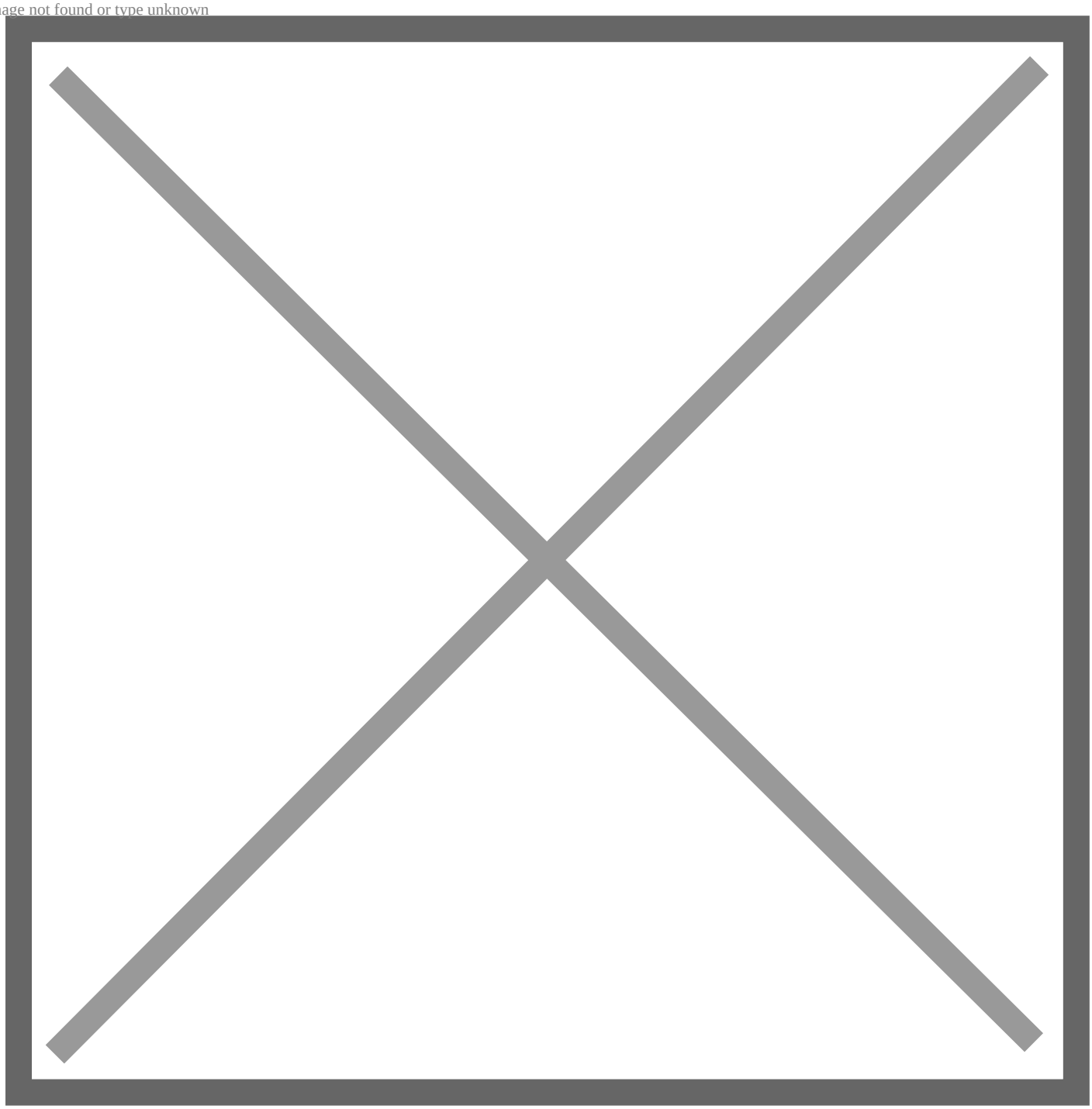

Preserving nature, protecting species and building healthy ecosystems are essential and conducive to living harmoniously on Earth. This is true now and will continue to be true in the future – what we do now matters. That's why Toyota Motor North America (Toyota) is committed to doing its part now to help ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy the natural wonders of our world.

As a part of the automaker's strategy to protect and promote biodiversity, a core focus of its Seventh Environmental Action Plan (FY2022 – FY2027), the company is providing support to the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) and Pollinator Partnership (P2) to enhance 26,000 acres of pollinator habitat across North America over the next five years. NEEF's mission is to make the environment more accessible, relatable, relevant and connected to the daily lives of all Americans, and P2 is dedicated to the protection and promotion of pollinators and their ecosystems.

Toyota is providing $200,000 to each nonprofit organization that will directly go towards projects that will help nurture the monarch butterfly and other pollinator species.

NEEF will be responsible for the development, implementation and ongoing management of the 2022 Biodiversity Conservation Grant Program, which will provide funding to habitat enhancement projects that support the creation, restoration, remediation, improvement, and/or protection of habitats for important pollinator species such as butterflies, bees, bats, and more. The organization will select the grantees, manage the payments, and work with the grantees during the life of their project. NEEF will also be responsible for evaluating and reporting on the projects and sharing their impacts back to Toyota.

"We worked closely with Toyota's Environmental Sustainability team to set overall goals and environmental priorities for the grant program," says Tony Richardson, program director for Public Lands Engagement at NEEF. "We've received nearly 300 letters of intent, which tells us there is an incredible demand for this type of support and some incredible work going on throughout the country."

For its part, P2 is working with the support of Toyota to launch the Pollinator Friendly Places initiative. Through this program, P2 will help Toyota create, enhance, and protect thousands of acres of habitat for pollinators, increase landowner education, increase the implementation of best management practices, provide education and volunteer opportunities to Toyota staff and the public, and ultimately support the health of pollinators across North America.

Why are these projects so important? These resources will help protect pollinators, which are crucial to the ecosystem.

"Pollinators play a necessary role in the reproduction of up to 90% of the flowering plants around the globe," says Kelly Rourke, executive director of P2. "Without pollinators, the plants that most other wildlife rely on would not be able to reproduce, and therefore, pollinators are 'keystone' species in our natural areas — species that are needed for all others to survive. About 75% of our crop plants require or benefit from pollination, so without pollinators we wouldn't have many of the foods we enjoy, like blueberries, coffee, chocolate and apples."

Creating a Thriving Habitat

To effectively support pollinators, habitat should include food (such as pollen, nectar, and host plants), shelter, and nesting sites for the species. These areas should also be protected from harmful chemical exposure, such as pesticides. Preserving pollinators and their habitats is key to keeping fruits, vegetables, and other food staples on kitchen tables across the world.

“One of the biggest threats to pollinators and a major cause of their decline is loss of habitat,” explains Amber Barnes, conservation program manager for Pollinator Partnership. “They need areas with diverse wildflowers and nesting sites to survive and thrive. With the conversion of much of our land area to agriculture, industrial uses, and towns and cities, bees and other pollinators are finding it hard to find places to live. By creating, enhancing, and protecting pollinator habitats, we can actively make a significant difference for pollinators.”

The reason Toyota chose to support 26,000 acres of pollinator habitat is because the land area is equal to the 26,000 acres that the company’s facilities currently occupy across North America. These habitat areas will be located across the United States, Mexico and Canada.

“Toyota believes in supporting pollinator populations in an effort to try to prevent further declines, because we recognize pollinators are so critical to our food system,” says Becky Martin, manager of Environmental Sustainability at Toyota. “Pollinators are responsible for bringing us one out of every three bites of food. We are working with P2 and NEEF because we realize it’s important to partner with experts in pollinator conservation in order to properly create, protect and enhance 26,000 acres of habitat.”

Buzzing With Benefits

The benefits of pollinator habitats abound. Pollinators such as bees, butterflies, moths, flower flies, beetles and bats all benefit from these habitats. Other creatures including bears, deer, and snakes can benefit from the flowers, plants or insects using the flowers. Importantly, pollinator habitats also support the insects, bats, and birds that help control garden and crop pests.

“Pollinators are keystone species in our natural ecosystems, allowing flowering plants to reproduce and provide resources for all the other wildlife in natural areas,” says Barnes. “We need a diversity of pollinators to ensure pollination of diverse plant communities. Many pollinators also have additional roles in the ecosystem, supporting biodiversity through being prey for other wildlife and helping with decomposition.”

Driving Action Now

With the effects of climate change in full swing, the time to act is now. Preserving pollinator landscapes is critical in preventing a detrimental domino effect.

“Ecosystems as we know them would collapse if populations of pollinators were to seriously decline or go extinct,” says Rourke. “If only some pollinators were lost, other pollinators may be able to take on their role; however, that relies on thriving, diverse populations of many pollinators, which are currently in peril. If most populations were gone, plants would not reproduce, wildlife would not have the plants, seeds and fruits they rely on and would also die, and insects and microorganisms would not have the organic material — plants and animals — they need to live.”

For Toyota, combining efforts with P2 and NEEF is a way to amplify the organizations’ programs and respective activities, as well as support the automaker’s sustainability and biodiversity goals.

“Toyota’s global vision of Respect for the Planet is a core value of the company and a driving force behind our environmental strategy,” says Martin. “This project is being implemented to meet a biodiversity target in our Seventh Environmental Action Plan. Our Environmental Action Plans are five-year plans that we develop to guide us in achieving the longer-term Toyota Environmental Challenge 2050, intended to have a net-positive impact on society by 2050.”

It Takes a Village

Finding other companies and organizations that share the same values of protecting habitat is essential to preserving nature. Without a community and dedicated team of people who support environmental efforts, progress is impossible.

“Community engagement and volunteer participation is important for so many reasons,” says Barnes. “The problem is, many people don’t know who our pollinators are, what they need, and what they can do to help. By engaging with the community and recruiting their help in enhancing the pollinator habitat at some of these sites, volunteers can take ownership and pride in the good work they helped initiate. They also learn new skills and information that they can then apply at home or in their neighborhoods.”

“NEEF will also work with Toyota to provide hands-on volunteer activities throughout the year for Toyota team members and their families and allow them to actively participate in pollinator enhancement projects supported by this grant program,” adds Richardson.

Through activities like these, Toyota hopes to educate citizens and raise awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability and how it affects everyday life.

“We are excited to create, enhance, and protect these habitats for pollinators,” says Martin. “We hope to encourage other organizations to develop large amounts of habitat so pollinator species that are in decline will increase in number. We also hope to encourage other corporations to join us in making commitments to protecting nature and biodiversity.”

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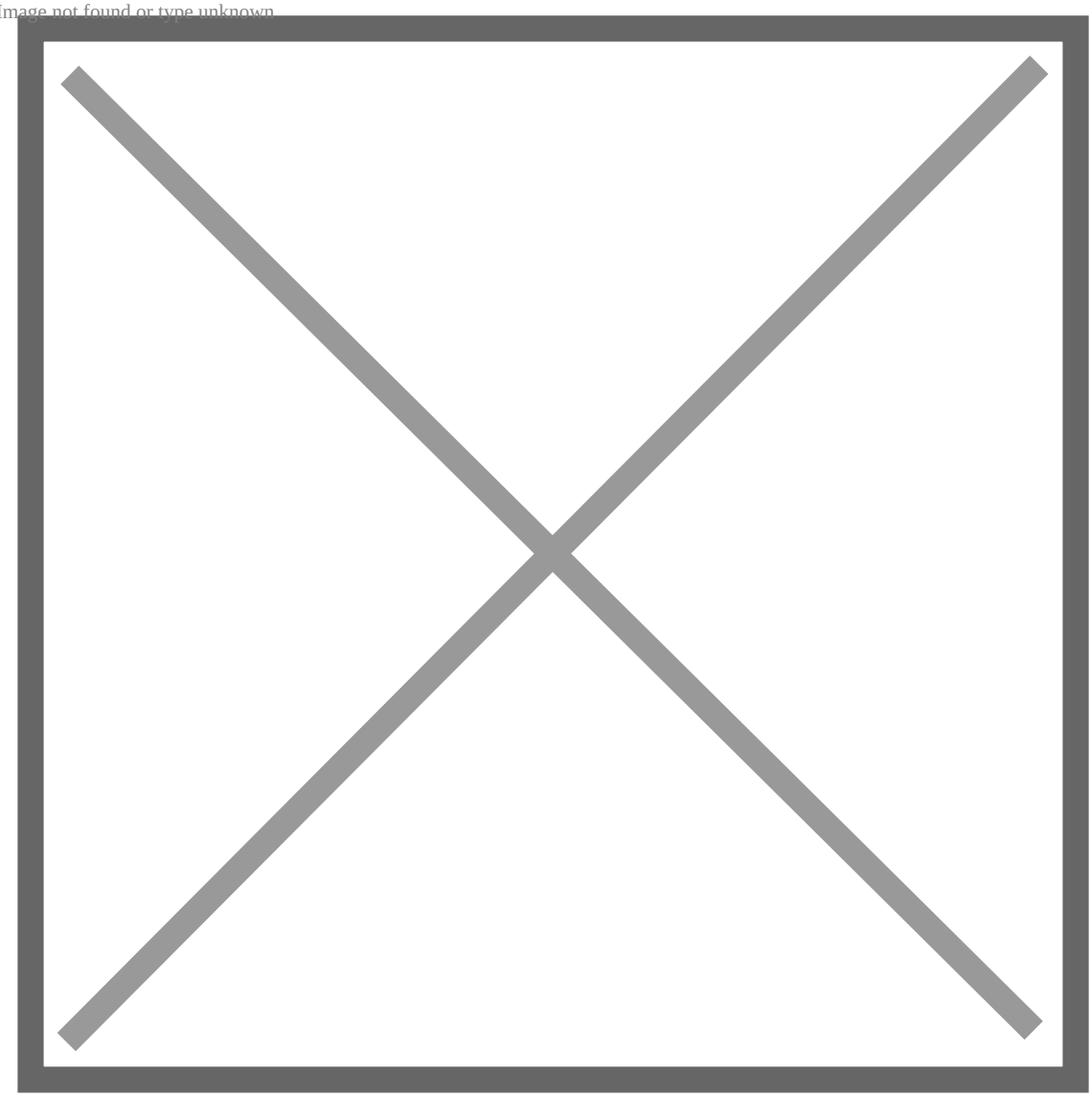

To learn more about this project, please visit the NEEF and P2 websites for more information.