How Toyota Is Helping Preserve an Iconic National Park

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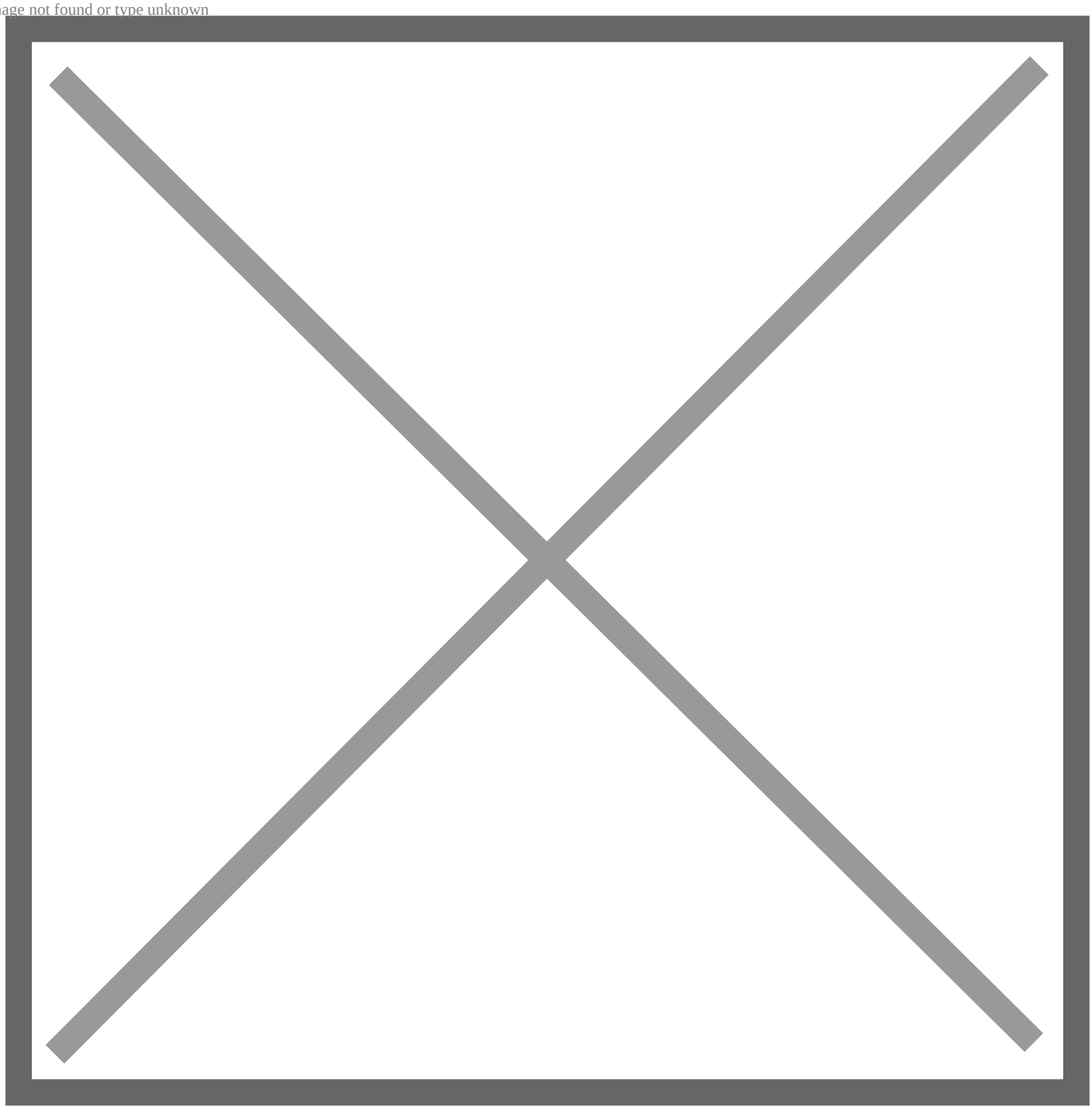
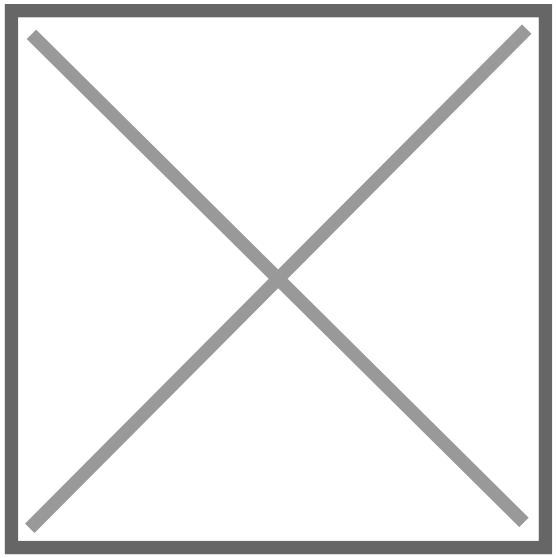


Toyota’s work with Yellowstone National Park began with four Priuses. The hybrid vehicles were perfect for supporting visitor services and helping to reduce the park’s overall environmental footprint, according to Kevin Butt, senior director of Environmental Sustainability for Toyota Motor North America (TMNA) and chair of Yellowstone Forever (formerly known as the Yellowstone Park Foundation Board). Plus, there was an unexpected third benefit: raising environmental awareness.

“We were just trying to make a contribution toward Yellowstone’s energy efficiency, but it turned into an unexpectedly great marketing tool for Prius,” says Butt. “When rangers drove them to manage crowds at bear jams, they wound up really engaging with visitors over the benefits and fuel efficiency of hybrid technology.”

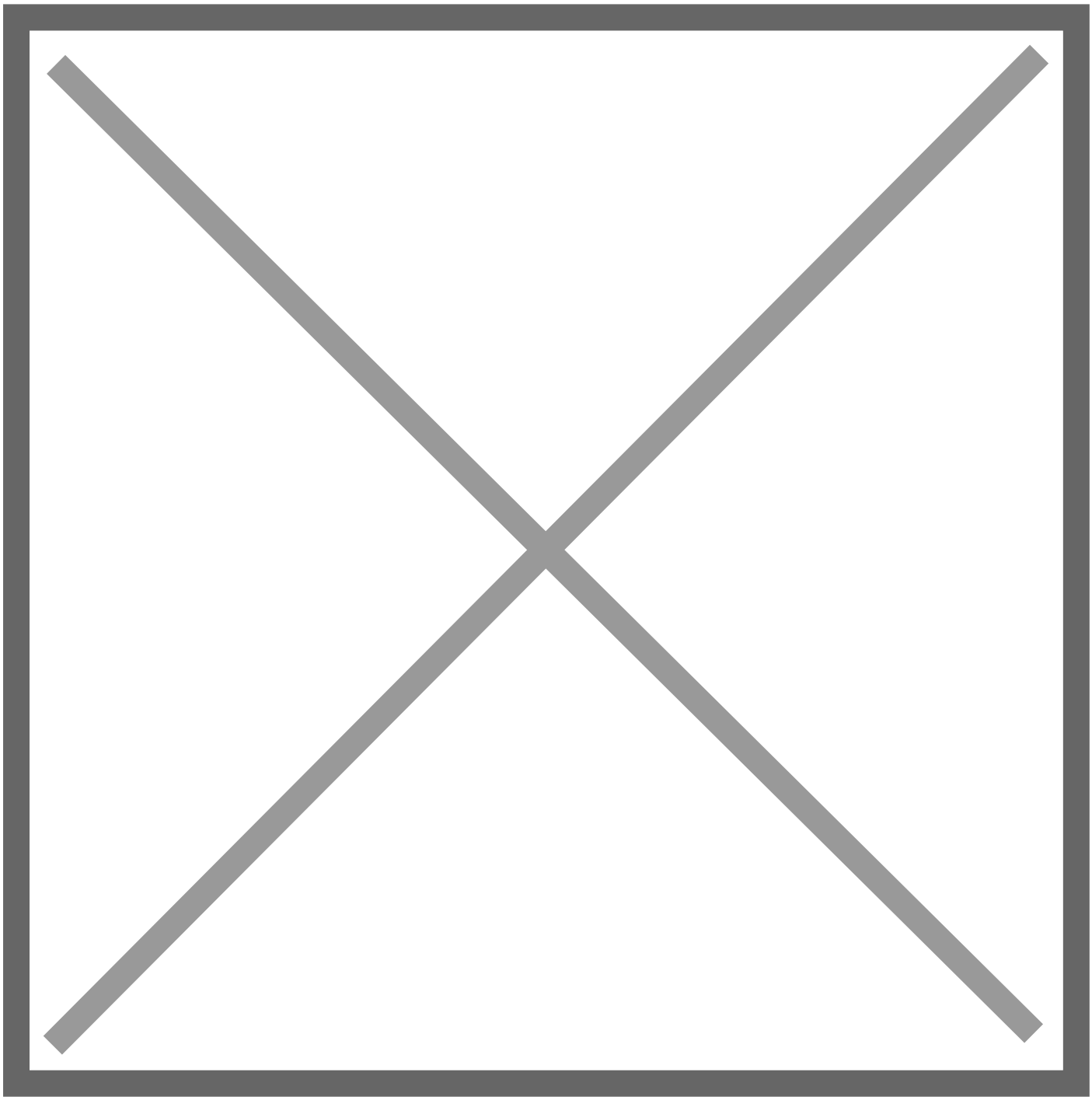


Donated by Toyota in 2004, the vehicles were wrapped with images of nature found in the iconic national park, like bears, bison and the Old Faithful Visitor’s Center. After the success of the Yellowstone Priuses, Toyota also wrapped and donated some of the first hybrid Camrys and Highlanders to the park following those model launches.

Yellowstone Forever and Toyota are a natural fit, says Butt. Toyota’s dedication to having the greatest positive impact on society and the planet is well-aligned with Yellowstone’s goal of becoming the greenest park in the world.

“What inspired the collaboration from there was our closely shared goals around environmental sustainability and the desire to share our technology and our know-how,” Butt says.

A History of Education and Preservation



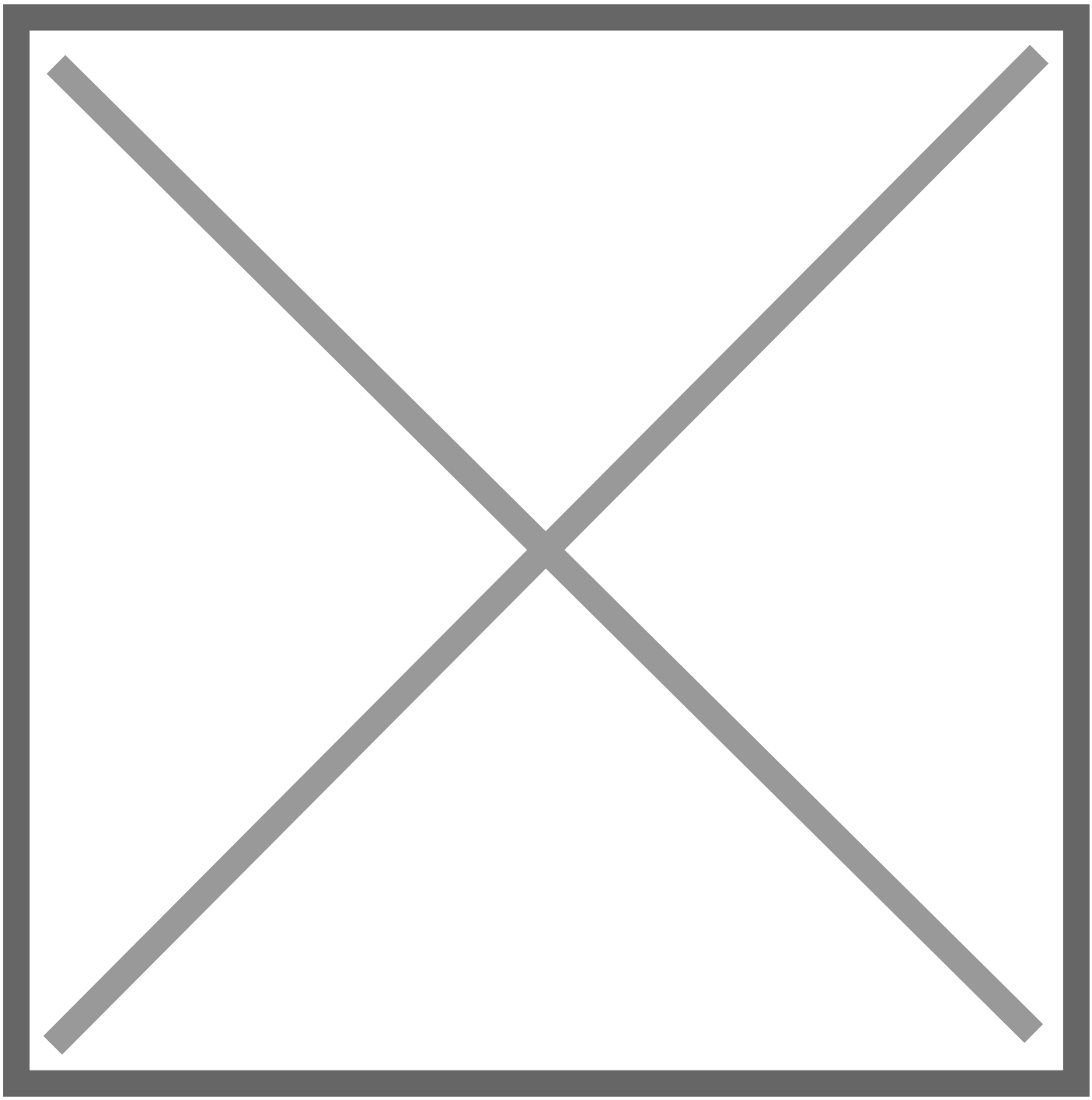
Over the years, the collaboration has accomplished a series of major achievements. In 2010, Toyota engineers helped design what would become the Yellowstone Old Faithful Visitor Education Center. That same year, Toyota also donated $1 million toward the construction of the center. In 2015, Lamar Buffalo Ranch, one of Yellowstone's ranger stations and educational centers, received a renewable distributed energy system that reuses Camry Hybrid battery packs to create a reliable, sustainable, zero-emission power source.

A year later, Toyota donated another $1 million toward the creation of a new Yellowstone National Park Youth Campus, which would both educate future conservationists and help shrink the campus' environmental footprint.

Lisa Diekmann, president and CEO?of Yellowstone Forever — the charitable arm of the park — says that Toyota's extensive work to improve the sustainability of Yellowstone's facilities, transportation and overall operations has played a significant role in sustaining the park's ecosystem and reducing its emissions.

"The future of Yellowstone rests on our commitment to sustainability — from decreasing light pollution to minimizing our carbon footprints," says Diekmann. "The shared vision and collaboration that Toyota brings to this project helps enhance the sustainability efforts in Yellowstone to ensure the park remains here, forever."

A Partnership Built Over Shared Goals



Since 2004, Toyota's collaboration with Yellowstone has only grown, with the mobility company working to fulfill three core goals: Help Yellowstone achieve its own sustainability goals, support biodiversity and wildlife conservation, and facilitate environmental outreach.

To accomplish these goals, Toyota continues to help improve the park's energy efficiency, contribute to its children's and educational programs, and share technical expertise with Yellowstone. Currently, Toyota is working on two sustainability projects with the team at Yellowstone. In June 2022, unprecedented amounts of rainfall caused a flood that destroyed roads and other infrastructure throughout Yellowstone. As part of one

project, Toyota is helping the park rebuild and raise awareness of the challenges.

“Yellowstone Forever developed a resiliency fund to not only make repairs, but bring forward projects to upgrade those facilities,” Butt says. “Toyota donated to the resiliency fund and attracted other corporate donors as well.”

For the other project, Toyota engineers are helping Yellowstone adopt one of the company’s best energy-saving techniques: upgrading to LED lights.

“Upgrading all the park lighting is a really extensive step toward sustainability and will greatly reduce overall energy consumption,” Butt says. “We’ve done this everywhere in our own facilities and it’s the No. 1 energy-saving step taken by our suppliers.”

And it’s not just Yellowstone that benefits. Butt says the collaboration goes both ways. Over the course of their collaborations, Yellowstone employees have been able to share some sustainability knowledge with Toyota employees as well. As the oldest national park, Yellowstone inspires Toyota to consider the long term in a different way.

“Established in 1872, Yellowstone is dedicated to keeping things in nature just as they were in 1872, to respecting what we have, understanding its roots and understanding that not everything needs to change,” Butt says. “Some things must be kept as they are — that stands in contrast to the way we are trained to think in terms of continuous improvement, but it is great knowledge to have.”