

# The Nature Conservancy Expands LEAF Program: Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future

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**Made Possible by the Toyota USA Foundation**

June 21, 2010 – New York – Bolstering its commitment to connecting urban youth with nature, The Nature Conservancy and the Toyota USA Foundation are expanding *Leaders in Environmental Action for the Future: LEAF*—a comprehensive environmental leadership program for teenagers and their educators.

The Foundation's lead gift of \$800,000 will build on *LEAF*'s 16 years of success in New York City and provide critical funds to double the number of students and environmental high schools served in the New York City metro area. The 2010 grant will also help lay the foundation for *LEAF*'s expansion into new urban areas in 2011.

Aimed at inspiring and engaging the next wave of environmental leaders, *LEAF* combines enriched environmental curriculum in high school classrooms with paid residential summer jobs for students on Conservancy preserves from the rocky coasts of Maine to the longleaf pine forests of Georgia.

“The Toyota USA Foundation believes in supporting programs with long-term sustainable results. The Nature Conservancy and its partner environmental high schools have a successful history of empowering the next generation of environmentalists, and we are incredibly proud to support the growth of this program,” said Patricia Salas Pineda, Group Vice President of Philanthropy at Toyota Motor North America.

The unique partnership model of *LEAF* helps urban youth gain critical life, school and workplace skills; provides sustained exposure to nature; supports students pursuing higher education opportunities and career paths in environmental fields; and creates a passion for the outdoors.

In his article *Verbicide*, author David Orr noted that today's youth can identify over 1,000 corporate logos but fewer than 10 plants and animals native to their own backyard. According to an Aquatic Adventures survey, 90 percent of city youth do not know how to swim; 34 percent have never been to the beach.

“Learning about nature is like learning a new language” says Gladys Ruiz, a 1998 program alumna. “You don't fully ‘get it’ until you are immersed in it.”

*LEAF*'s expansion also aims to improve environmental literacy by supporting the first professional network for environmental high school educators to share best practices. In 2010, the program will support ten environmental schools in the New York metro area. The long term goal of *LEAF* is to engage over 30 environmental high schools in urban areas across the country, ultimately serving more than 20,000 students.

“Today's youth are more urban, more diverse, and more technologically advanced than any previous generation in history,” said Mark Tercek, President and CEO of The Nature Conservancy. “They are also more disconnected from nature than any previous generation. What we do today to engage a diverse array of young people in our work will ensure our conservation success in the future.”

**About The Nature Conservancy**

The Nature Conservancy is the leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. Since 1951, The Nature Conservancy has protected **more than 119 million acres of land** and **5,000 miles of rivers** worldwide — and we operate **more than 100 marine conservation projects** globally. The Nature Conservancy works in all 50 states and more than 30 countries—protecting habitats from grasslands to coral reefs, from Australia to Alaska to Zambia. For more information, visit [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).

#### **About the Toyota USA Foundation**

The Toyota USA Foundation is a \$100 million charitable endowment created to support education programs serving kindergarten through 12th grade students and their teachers in the United States, with an emphasis on mathematics, science and environmental science. For additional information about the Toyota USA Foundation, visit [www.toyota.com/foundation](http://www.toyota.com/foundation).