

communitynotes

Grant for conservation

A Frankfort woman is the recipient of a new national fellowship designed to advance the work of individuals with outstanding potential to help shape a brighter environmental future.

Kim Meyer Ramirez is one of only 40 people selected from competitors nationwide for the TogetherGreen Conservation Leadership Program, part of a new conservation initiative of the National Audubon Society with support from Toyota. Fellows receive specialized training in conservation planning and execution, the chance to work and share best practices with gifted conservation professionals, and assistance with project outreach and evaluation. Each fellow also will receive \$10,000 toward a community-focused project to engage local residents in conserving land, water and energy, and contributing to greater environmental health.

Ramirez will focus her efforts on the Midewin Bobolinking Project. The project will engage young adults from local high schools and community-based organizations in stewardship and biological monitoring projects at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Wilmington, making them all part of the conservation solution. The project will accomplish this through a series of workshops, field experiments and restoration workdays. The project will ensure that everyone in the community learns about this unique habitat. She will

mentor community members in ecological monitoring projects, equipping them with new skills, opening their eyes to the nature and wildlife that exists in their own backyard, and collecting data that can create better management practices at Midewin. By encouraging community members to become environmental stewards, Ramirez is helping protect Midewin and the wildlife that depends on it now and for the future.

Ramirez, currently a graduate student at Governors University, has been involved in conservation efforts for two decades and has proven to be a dedicated and innovative conservationist. In her previous position as a teaching assistant, she assisted with courses in zoology, environmental physiology and botany, among others, bringing her love of nature into the classroom. Ramirez also volunteers at Midewin as well as Sweet Fern Savanna Land and Water Reserve, Bartel Grassland and Orland Park Grassland, restoring habitat and monitoring bird populations.

"Kim is the kind of person who can make a real difference in the health of our environment and the quality of our future," said Audubon President John Flicker. "Each of our TogetherGreen fellows demonstrates exceptional environmental understanding and commitment, combined with tremendous potential to inspire and lead others. Together, they represent the talented and diverse leadership

the environmental community will need to tackle the huge challenges and opportunities confronting us now and in the years to come."

"The outcomes of this project will be two-fold," said Ramirez. "Data collected by participants will result in better ecological management practices for grassland birds and will increase community engagement in bird habit conservation, building further support for restoration efforts at Midewin."

Ramirez has been affiliated with Governors University since 2006. Half of the TogetherGreen fellows come from within Audubon's far-reaching national network; half channel their environmental efforts through other organizations.

Ramirez will receive a master's degree in environmental biology from Governors State University in 2009 and currently has a master's degree in public health from Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. She has worked with the Peace Corps in Honduras to improve environmental education and Constella Futures Group International to improve women's reproductive health.

"Toyota believes in the power of grass-roots efforts to develop the environmental leaders of tomorrow," said Patricia Salas Pineda, group vice president, Toyota Motor North America. "These 40 TogetherGreen fellows will receive invaluable training for the future while immediately making a difference today with on-the-ground community projects."