TogetherGreen Conservation Leadership Program 2011-2012
Final Narrative Report

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Project Title: Cultivating the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders
Organization: National Audubon Society
City, State: Missoula, Montana

Please complete each section below. Type your responses in the "ANSWER" section. Save your file with your name in the title, and submit to larnedo@audubon.org by ***January 31, 2013.***

Please submit any photos that would help support any of the sections described below.

SECTION ONE: Successes (Suggested word limit: 750 words)

1. What did your project accomplish? Please describe it as if to someone who knows very little about it.

ANSWER: Audubon Chapters across the country have expressed significant challenges in connecting with Millennials and engaging them in Chapter activities, fundraising, volunteering, and leadership. For duration of my fellowship, I worked with Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) as a test Chapter for focusing on Millennials as a new audience to engage in birding and conservation projects, with the ultimate goal cultivating members of this target audience to leadership positions. I spent the latter part of 2011 assessing the current operations of FVAS and conducting interviews with Millennials and reading articles on Millennial behavior and motivations for donating to and volunteering for non-profit organizations. Armed with information on what Millennials want out of their involvement with organizations, I planned and organized Chapter events, programs, and field trips that would appeal to this audience. I also created or assisted with revamping Chapter communications including an e-newsletter, Facebook page, and several websites. Throughout 2012, I recruited new Chapter participants, members, and volunteers, resulting in the recruitment of two Millennials to Chapter leadership positions.

2) Please go into more detail describing your project successes in terms of the following:

A) Conservation Targets and Behaviors

- *The conservation targets listed in your baseline worksheet (in the Describing Your Ecological Targets section)* –N/A
- *The desired behavior changes listed in your baseline worksheet (in the Describing Your Human Behavior Targets section)*

ANSWER:

A large segment of the Millennial population in Missoula, Montana is already interested and participating in outdoor recreation and environmental education and/or conservation-related activities. The University of Montana has strong programs in Environmental and Wilderness Studies that draw students from around the country. Once students attend the University, they often stay in the area due to affinity with the conservation-minded community and the wide variety of recreational opportunities available within and in close proximity to the city. Therefore, it wasn't for lack of interest in birds, other wildlife, or conservation that was keeping Millennials from getting involved in Five Valleys Audubon Society. They simply hadn't heard of it or didn't know of any peers who were already involved.

I conducted interviews with Millennial leaders in Chapters across the country as well as in other non-profit organizations in Missoula to determine how these particular leaders got involved; e.g., details regarding their background, what inspired their participation, and what they are getting from their involvement. In all cases, these leaders had at least one person in their lives who had turned them on to nature, birding, and/or conservation —specifically either a family member or teacher (and in a couple of cases, and Audubon Chapter leader)—and their involvement in the Chapter resulted most often from a direct ask by a Chapter leader. All said they enjoyed their leadership position in the Chapter because they felt they were appreciated, that they were contributing something worthwhile, and gaining valuable leadership experience.

With this and other research on Millennials in hand, I organized a trip to see Snowy Owls in the Mission Valley in January 2012. Fortunately, we have access to a world-renown owl expert, Denver Holt, who was a significant draw to the event. Advertising with only a couple of posts to my list of 100+ Missoula Facebook friends and a few emails to Environmental Studies professors at the University, we had over 75 registrants in just two days, necessitating the creation of a second trip to manage the group size. I promoted the trip as being a fun way to spend time with friends searching for the owls and meeting others with similar interests. We set up carpools departing from a parking lot at the University to make it easy for students to attend. After both trips, we encouraged people to stick around and grab a late lunch at a local restaurant—further building relationships with attendees. I posted many photos of the event to Facebook and encouraged others to do the same and tag themselves and their friends.

I planned several other trips, with emphasis on fun, family-friendly, spending time with friends and making new ones, and meeting experts in the field. All the while, we were collecting building the Chapter email list and starting a volunteer database (something the Chapter had never had previously). At an Earth Day event, I organized several volunteers and set up tables with a variety of activities targeted to parents and their young children.

We were swamped for the afternoon by 250+ kids and their parents who wanted to play the Bird Quiz Buzzer Board I designed, make a pine cone bird feeder, or meet our live kestrel. The most significant event I planned was the fall Bird Migration Celebration which featured six activities from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., including a birders' breakfast and beginning birder walk, activities for kids, backyard habitat tour, birds & brew (with a live Peregrine Falcon and Golden Eagle), and bird-themed films. Leading up to the event, I recruited and trained a dozen Millennial volunteers, who were thrilled to assist and expressed interest in other Chapter volunteer opportunities.

I had anticipated being able to engage Millennials in Chapter activities in these 18 months, as well as develop strategies for cultivating them to Chapter leadership, but I hadn't expected any new recruits to step up to leadership this past year. To my surprise, we had two young people join the Chapter's leadership team—as a field trip leader (gentleman at the far right) and newsletter mailing coordinator (woman in photo at left)!

In talking with these newly participating Millennials, I discovered that they indeed had preconceived notions about Audubon being an older person's organization, but through the new types of outreach – with the focus on networking and fun in addition to education and conservation – we were able to experience some success in engaging this new audience.

B) Partnerships

- *How successful were your partnerships? What worked best and why?*

ANSWER:

My partnership with the Five Valleys Audubon Society was successful—particularly in working with the new president and several other Chapter leaders. I formed a NextGen Audubon team within the Chapter and trained them on how to use Facebook and create posts for our new page. I also worked with the director of the University of Montana Natural Areas program on the Fort Missoula Prairie Restoration (Conservation Action Project), who was also my project mentor. I would say I could have done better to work more effectively with current partners and also engage additional partners. There were other organizations and businesses that I worked with throughout the year (e.g., the Owl Research Institute, Caras Nursery & Landscape), but I'm not sure those would qualify as partners since it was collaboration on a specific event and not an ongoing project (though there is potential to work with them again in the future). I found that often I ended up doing many things myself rather than involving partners because it was just simpler than cultivating that relationship and depending on someone else's timeframe. I realize that isn't ideal, but in my limited time for this fellowship project, that is sometimes what I had to do.

C) Audiences

- *Which audiences have you reached and what strategies have been successful? We particularly want to hear about how you are engaging new and underserved audiences.)*

ANSWER:

My new target audience was Millennials, broken down into:

1) University of Montana students
2) Young professionals
3) Parents with young children

Please also see 2A for details on how I engaged these audiences.

Parents with young children seemed to be attracted to our beginning birder walks, which tend to be slower-paced and family-friendly. Also the kids' activities we had at an Earth Day event and during the Bird Migration Celebration were a big hit. Five Valleys Audubon Society hadn't previously provided many opportunities to kids or their parents, so this was a new area of experimentation.

In spite of the immediate proximity of the University of Montana, Five Valleys Audubon hadn't done much to promote the Chapter on campus. I reached out to several student conservation groups, professors in Environmental and Wildlife Studies, and hung fliers (with QR codes) on campus for several of our events.

Through my interviews with Millennials, I discovered that students and young professionals are looking for opportunities to meet and work with experts in the environmental fields. Five Valleys Audubon Society has many connections in that arena, so we were able to arrange several programs and events with noteworthy leaders and presenters. Millennials also like meeting and networking with peers who share similar interests, so it was important to add a social component to our planned programs as well as develop few activities with an entirely social focus (like the Birds and Brew event during the Bird Migration Celebration).

D) Your Professional Development

- *Have you taken any courses and/or attended any workshops that have informed your work? How are you using your mentor?*

ANSWER:

I used the professional development funds for myself (Master Naturalist certification, video blogging class and Facebook for business class (the latter begins in March)) and the Chapter president (WordPress and Pinterest classes).

The Master Naturalist certification course was great, because I wanted to get an idea about how Five Valleys Audubon Society could run such a course (in case we start a Master Birder certification for training Chapter field trip leaders). The instructor is a very

good birder and field trip leader, so I also learned many good techniques for leading field trips and working specifically with beginning birders.

I am currently halfway through my video blogging class. Video is the way young Internet users are obtaining a lot of their information—Facebook is somewhat passé for the Millennial generation. I will be sharing what I learn with the Five Valleys Audubon Society and the rest of the Chapter network.

After taking the WordPress class, our Chapter president designed a beautiful, contemporary-looking, CMS-based website, which is light-years better than the outdated HTML site.

SECTION TWO: Challenges (Suggested word limit: 600 words)

What are the biggest challenges you have faced so far, and how have you responded to those challenges? (For example, looking back at your baseline worksheet logic model, have you had to make any modifications to your project strategies? If so, why?)

ANSWER:

I made many modifications to project strategies, particularly in narrowing my focus to one Chapter, when I originally planned to work with three. One non-profit organization proved challenging enough, given that this project was outside the scope of my regular workload. Also, finding an ideal Conservation Action Project was a struggle. The Chapter's focus has been mostly on education and conservation projects that don't lend themselves to involving more than just a few skilled people. After looking into several project ideas, I decided to partner with the University of Montana Natural Areas program that had a piece of property near my office with a mostly shovel-ready restoration project. That project had its problems as well, in that the site is not considered critical bird habitat, so the Chapter wasn't inspired to take a significant part in it. The site also has significant historical significance (former WWII internment camp), so we weren't able to do any digging or weed-pulling; therefore, we removed invasive plant species with chainsaws and herbicide. I had more success with organizing events and trips and getting Millennial participants and volunteers involved in those. Now we have a small volunteer "army" for when the Chapter does develop conservation projects that can involve them.

The Five Valleys Audubon Society was interested in being part of my fellowship project, and I convinced a half dozen of the current leadership to form a committee—the NextGen Audubon team—to assist me throughout the project. However, though I met with them monthly in the beginning and they were verbally supportive of the majority of the ideas I proposed, they seemed overwhelmed and uncertain of how they could help, and I wasn't sure how to plug them in, either. Therefore, I ended up doing just about everything myself, with some help from our student assistant at the office, a few consultants, and the Chapter president. I was also able to recruit a good number of Millennial volunteers to help on the day of the Bird Migration Celebration.

It was very challenging to work with a non-profit organization that has been established for a long time and is run by an older group of folks who are comfortable in their roles and with the way things have been. I proposed a great number of new ideas and

suggested changes; a few of which were implemented this past year and others which are on the table for consideration in the future. I was extremely fortunate that a new and enthusiastic president came on board in January 2012. He is tech-savvy and willing to try new things, and he was very helpful and responsive in our collaborations.

My mentor, Marilyn Marler, is great and I only wish I'd had more time and thought to utilize her good guidance. I ended up doing some things in more of a rushed manner than working carefully through the strategies with her.

SECTION THREE: Financial Report (Suggested word limit: 300 words)

Please briefly describe how you have spent your grant funds. Attach a completed budget form.

ANSWER:

I spent the majority of the funds on project supplies ($3,656), followed by staff time and consultants ($3,322), other expenses ($1,553) and food ($568). It was incredibly helpful to use a bit of the Chapter Services' work study students' time to work on planning the Bird Migration Celebration, and various consultants provided invaluable information and work on the Fort Missoula Prairie restoration project. Funds for food at the various events I coordinated turned out to be a great draw for people from all generations and audiences. I never used TG funds to purchase alcohol, but several events were held at establishments where alcohol was available for purchase, and with the Chapter providing free food and live birds or other educational opportunities—we found a winning formula to appeal to younger folks. The Chapter had no funds in their budget for communications or marketing, so TG funds were helpful for event promotions, e.g., through Facebook Ads and a Valpak circular. Five Valleys Audubon saw good results from this promotion which has them considering adding a line item in the budget for marketing and communications next year.

SECTION FOUR: Storytelling and Feedback (Suggested word limit: 300 words).

Tell us a quick story about your project that helps illustrate its importance, effectiveness, or impact..

(Think about a story you might you tell to a good friend to describe the project to them. A compelling anecdote about the project can really help others to understand what it means to participants and to the environment. Don't forget to include quotes from partners and/ or participants if you have them!) (Suggested word limit: 300 words)

ANSWER:

I organized a Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) beginning bird walk to Maclay Flat in March 2012 which was kid- and family-friendly. A young couple (Alex and Sarah Baer) attended—who were at that time expecting a baby. Alex loves to take photos and they both enjoy being outdoors, so they quickly embraced birding as their newest passion. After their son, Fletcher, was born, all three of them showed up to staff the FVAS table on Earth

Day (photo at left). They continued to respond to volunteer requests throughout the year. Last fall, when FVAS put out the call for a Newsletter Mailing Coordinator, Sarah responded and now coordinates the monthly newsletter mailing. She, Alex and Fletcher still regularly attend FVAS events and invite their friends, too—most recently they attended a Saw-whet Owl banding event—again at Maclay Flat, back where this whole bird craziness started!

SECTION FIVE: Sustainability (Suggested word limit: 300 words).

How will your work continue beyond the end of the *TogetherGreen* Fellowship? Have you been able to leverage funds for your work? If so, how much in direct support? How much in in-kind support? (number of volunteers, time from other agencies or partners, use of equipment, etc.)

ANSWER

I believe the Five Valleys Audubon Society appreciated and was impressed by the work I did with their Chapter and the results I obtained through Facebook (about which they were initially very skeptical), member and volunteer recruitment, the Earth Day table, and particularly the Bird Migration Celebration. It was a lot of new things for them to experience in one year, and I doubt they will continue all the things I initiated; however, the project did make it clear to them that the Millennial generation had been a missing component and it is not that difficult to connected with Millennials or offer them what they want. It is just a matter of putting some time and thought into developing and maintaining a new twist on some programs and looking beyond the scope of education to conservation and social activities. I will be stepping back significantly from my involvement with the Chapter at the completion of the fellowship, but I would like to continue working with them in some capacity, e.g., helping to improve their print and electronic communications.

The Chapter is good at raising money through its Birdathon, and I'd like to encourage them to put more of those funds towards their own conservation projects and also towards marketing and communications (currently, they donate much of their funds to other organizations who do conservation work).

The 10K *TogetherGreen* grant was adequate for funding the project; therefore I only pursued a few in-kind donations (~$1,500) and a bit of monetary support ($390) for the Bird Migration Celebration. My efforts were assisted by about 30 volunteers who gave 150 hours of their time throughout 2012. My project mentor, Marilyn Marler, met with me monthly, sponsored the backyard habitat tour during the Bird Migration Celebration, and donated a silent auction item to the Celebration (~40 hours). Avian Science Center staff met with me to discuss ideas for involving Millennials and led two trainings on Osprey and Lewis' Woodpecker nest searching and mapping (~8 hours). In addition, all the Millennials I interviewed at the beginning of the project (25) gave ~30 hours collectively.

The part of the project that I have control over sustaining is sharing the information I've gained with the entire network of Audubon Chapters. Five Valleys Audubon Society was the testing ground, but now the work begins to develop resources and trainings for other

Chapters focused on engaging Millennials. I plan to create a webinar for Chapter leaders this year as well as several resources for audubon.org.

SECTION SIX: Feedback (optional)

We'd love to receive any feedback (both positive feedback and ways to improve) you have about the Fellows program. How would you like to continue to connect to 2011 Fellows and future Fellows classes? Would you be willing to serve as a resource for future Fellows classes? What would you hope to get out of an Alumni Program?

ANSWER:

I haven't used the alumni network or even my cohorts among the 2011 Fellows. I am sure there is a wealth of information and networking opportunities to be had there, but I was so busy with my Audubon job plus the fellowship and everything else I'm involved in that I did not take advantage of it. I would be happy to provide occasional advisory assistance to future Fellows classes, but could not dedicate enough time to being a mentor.

Thanks for completing the final narrative report.
Remember to send it to larnedo@audubon.org by January 31, 2011.