

Specialty license plates are available to any owner or lessee of a motor vehicle who is willing to pay an annual use fee for the privilege. Annual use fees ranging from \$15 to \$25, paid in addition to required license taxes and service fees, are distributed to an organization or organization in support of a particular cause or charity signified in the plate's design and designated in statute. The Legislature may create a specialty license plate under its own initiative or it can do so at the request of an organization.

Section 320.08053, F.S., provides an organization seeking authorization to establish a specialty license plate must submit the following:

- A request for the particular license plate with a description of the proposed plate in specific terms, including a sample plate conforming to the specifications set by DHSMV.
- The results of a scientific sample survey of Florida motor vehicle owners that indicates at least 30,000 motor vehicle owners intend to purchase the proposed specialty license plate at the increased costs. The Auditor General is required to validate the methodology, results, and any evaluation by DHSMV of the scientific sample survey prior to the submission of the specialty license plate for approval by the Legislature.
- An application fee, not to exceed \$60,000, to defray DHSMV's cost for reviewing the application and developing the specialty license plate, if authorized.
- A marketing strategy outlining both the short and long term marketing plans and a financial analysis outlining the anticipated revenue and the planned expenditures of the revenue from the requested specialty license plate.

The required documentation and fees must be submitted at least 90 days before the convening of the next regular session of the Florida Legislature. If a specialty license plate is approved by law, the organization must submit a proposed art design for the specialty plate to DHSMV no later than 60 days after the act becomes a law. If the specialty license plate is not approved by the Legislature, the application fee is refunded to the requesting organization.

In 2008, the Legislature passed SB 1992, which included a moratorium on the issuance of specialty plates by DHSMV. The moratorium is effective from July 1, 2008 to July 1, 2011, but contains an exception "for [any] specialty license plate proposal which has submitted a letter of intent to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles prior to May 2, 2008" or "which was included in a bill filed during the 2008 Legislative Session."¹

Section 320.08056, F.S., provides DHSMV is responsible for developing the specialty license plates and must begin production and distribution within one year after approval of the specialty license plate by the Legislature. Specialty license plates must bear the design required by law for the appropriate specialty plate, and the designs and colors must be approved by DHSMV. In addition, the specialty license plate must bear the imprint of numerals from 1 to 999, inclusive, capital letters "A" through "Z", or a combination thereof.

¹ S. 45, 2008-176, Laws of Florida

DHSMV is authorized to annually retain the first proceeds derived from the annual use fees collected in an amount sufficient to defray each specialty plate's pro rata (proportionate) share of DHSMV's costs directly related to issuing the specialty license plate. A person wishing to purchase a specialty license plate must pay, in addition to the required license plate fee and license tax, a license plate annual use fee (from \$15 to \$25) and a processing fee of \$2.

DHSMV must discontinue the issuance of an approved specialty plate if the number of valid specialty license plates in use falls below 1,000 plates for at least 12 consecutive months. DHSMV is authorized to discontinue the issuance and distribution of specialty plates if the organization no longer exists, if the organization has stopped providing services authorized to be funded, or if the organization requests it. To date, only four plates have ever been discontinued for lack of sales. These plates are the Girl Scouts plate, the Orlando Predators plate, the Miami Hooters plate, and the Tampa Bay Storm plate.

Annual use fees or any interest earned from those fees may not be used for commercial or for-profit activities, or for general administrative expenses (except as specifically authorized or to pay the cost of the audit or report required to ensure the proceeds are used as authorized).

Section 320.08058, F.S., lists the approved specialty license plates and specifies funding requirements.

Section 320.08062, F.S., requires all organizations receiving annual use fee proceeds from DHSMV to be responsible for ensuring proceeds are used in accordance with ss. 320.08056 and 320.08058, F.S. Each organization is either subject to an audit or is required to annually attest, under penalties of perjury, that such proceeds were used correctly. DHSMV can examine all records pertaining to the use of specialty license plate revenues.

The Legislature has authorized 111 specialty license plates to date. Sales of specialty license plates generated over \$35 million in annual use fee revenues during the 2008 Fiscal Year (July 2007-June 2008).

St. Johns River Alliance, Inc.

The St. Johns River Alliance, Inc., is a nonprofit organization that seeks to preserve, protect, promote, restore and celebrate the St. Johns River as an American Heritage River, based on its ecological, historic, economic, recreational and cultural significance. The organization is organized across 13 counties to protect the St. Johns River waterway and promote research.

DHSMV has found that the "St. Johns River" license plate has met the application requirements and falls within the exception from the moratorium on new specialty license plates created by the 2008 Legislature, as the organization submitted its materials before May 2, 2008.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill authorizes DHSMV to develop and issue a St. Johns River Alliance, Inc., license plate titled "St. Johns River." Drivers can purchase this specialty plate upon payment of the appropriate license taxes and fees and a \$25 annual use fee.

The first \$60,000 of annual use fees shall reimburse the organization for administrative and startup costs. Thereafter, annual use fees shall be distributed to the St. Johns River Alliance, Inc., which may use up to 10 percent of the of the proceeds for the administrative costs directly associated with education programs, conservation, research, and grant administration of the organization and up to 10 percent of the proceeds for the promotion and marketing of the plates. At least 30 percent of the fees shall be available for competitive grants for targeted community-based or county-based research or projects for which state funding is limited or not currently available. The remaining 50 percent of the proceeds shall be directed toward community outreach and access programs.

The competitive grants shall be administered and approved by the board of directors of the St. Johns River Alliance, Inc. A grant advisory committee shall be composed of six members chosen by the St. Johns River Alliance board members.

The bill shall take effect July 1, 2009.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

Persons wishing to purchase a “St. Johns River” plate can do so for an additional charge of \$25 (plus \$2 processing fee) beyond the normal fees associated with buying a license plate.

The St. Johns River Alliance, Inc., has paid the \$60,000 application fee, which will be refunded if the plate is not approved by the Legislature.

C. Government Sector Impact:

DHSMV is responsible for developing and distributing the “St. Johns River” license plate. The cost of this effort is approximately \$60,000. This impact will be offset by the \$60,000 application fee that the organization has already paid.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

DHSMV recommends amending Section 2 to remove reference to creation of the St. Johns River license plate, notwithstanding s. 320.08053, F.S. The language should state the DHSMV shall develop a St. Johns River license plate. DHSMV also recommends changing the effective date to October 1, 2009.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

Barcode 153030 by the Committee on Transportation on March 25, 2009:

This amendment removes, from Section 2, reference to creation of the St. Johns River license plate, notwithstanding s. 320.08053, F.S, and changes the language to state the DHSMV shall develop a St. Johns River license plate.

Barcode 164920 by the Committee on Transportation on March 25, 2009:

This amendment changes the effective date to October 1, 2009.