
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 2734
Author: Hart (D)
Amended: 7/2/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 7-0, 7/1/26

AYES: Becker, Seyarto, Allen, Cabaldon, Grove, Laird, Stern

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/13/26

AYES: Cervantes, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 5/26/26 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Vehicles: special interest license plates

SOURCE: Outdoor Outreach
Salted Roots
TreePeople

DIGEST: This bill revises the formula for how funds from the Whale Tail environmental specialty license plate are allocated.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF), which is a depository for money collected from personalized license plates and specialty plate programs to fund various natural resources and environmental protection-related programs.
- 2) Authorizes an organization to apply to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to create a special interest license plate to, among other things, raise funds, and requires the DMV to create a special interest license plate if the

sponsoring organization meets specified criteria and secures 7,500 signups for the plate in 12 months.

- 3) Requires the DMV, after deducting its administrative costs, to evenly split the additional money raised from issuing the Whale Tail specialty plates into California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account (CBCEA) inside the ELPF and the ELPF.
 - a) Of the funds given to the CBCEA, the money is allocated first to the Coastal Commission to pay for the Adopt-A-Beach program, the Beach Cleanup Day program, coastal public education programs, and to fund grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations to operate and maintain public beaches related to these programs.
 - b) After that, any remaining funds are allocated to the State Coastal Conservancy for coastal natural resource restoration and enhancement projects.

This bill:

- 1) Changes the current allocation formula for the specific fees associated with the Whale Tail specialty plate after January 1, 2027, as follows:
 - a) The ELPF will receive \$0 funding.
 - b) The CBCEA will receive 50% of the funding and the money will be allocated to the Coastal Commission to pay for the Whale Tail Grants program, the Adopt-A-Beach program, the Coastal Day Cleanup program, and other coastal education programs.
 - c) The other 50% of the funds will go into the Coastal Conservancy Fund's Coastal Access Account to support the Coastal Conservancy's Explore the Coast grants.

Background

ELPF. The Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF) was created in 1979, funded initially by money collected by the DMV from drivers buying personalized license plates. Since then, ELPF's funding has also come from other sources, including specialty license plates. The money is used to pay for various natural resources and environmental protection-related programs through the Environmental Protection Program, which is run by the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA) Secretary who develops its programs and priorities.

One of the specialty license plates supporting the ELPF is the Whale Tail License Plate.

A Whale of An Idea. The Whale Tail License Plate is an official specialty license plate that's been issued by the DMV since 1997. It costs \$50 – or \$103 if a buyer wants to personalize it instead of having a randomly issued license plate number. About a quarter of a million plates have been issued over the program's 20-year history, bringing in more than \$35 million.

Follow The Money. When a driver gets a personalized, specialty license plate for their vehicle, they're paying two fees:

- The cost of the specialty plate (Whale Tale, Yosemite, Veterans, etc.)
- The cost for personalizing the plate

The money from the *personalization* fee attached to all of the state's specialty license plates generally goes entirely to the ELPF, but how the *specialization* fee attached to the plate is split varies by plate.

The Yosemite (created in 1993) and Whale Tail (1997) plates split their *specialization* fee 50-50 with the ELPF, meaning for each plate sold, those entities only get about 25% of the total money paid (since the specialization and personalization fees are roughly equal and all of the personalization fees go to the ELPF).

Letting Sponsors Keep The Specialty Plate Fees. All sponsored specialty plates created since 2002 keep all their *specialization* base fees (apart from a small administrative fee to the DMV), while all of the *personalization* money continues to go to the ELPF for an average 50-50 split of the funds. The sponsoring organizations of some plates, such as Memorial and Veterans, retain both *specialization* and *personalization* fees (minus the DMV charges). On the other hand, because the California 1960s Legacy Plate has no sponsoring organization, all of its *specialization* and *personalization* fees go to the ELPF.

Comments

Purpose of the bill. According to the author, "AB 2734 will strengthen coastal access and education programs by creating a more sustainable funding structure for Whale Tail License Plate revenue. California's Whale Tail grants and Explore the Coast grants help connect individuals, especially in underserved communities, to the coast by supporting outdoor education, hands-on learning, and environmental stewardship opportunities. This helps ensure that all Californians have access to all

the physical and mental benefits of spending time outdoors and engaging with California's natural resources. Yet under current law, only 25% of the Whale Tail revenue goes to these funds, leaving underserved and barrier-facing communities with fewer opportunities to access the coast. AB 2734 updates that structure by splitting new revenues evenly between the California Coastal Commission's Whale Tail Grant Program and the State Coastal Conservancy's Explore the Coast grants, ensuring the revenue from the Whale Tail License plate directly supports coastal access."

Creating Winners & Losers. On the one hand, this measure certainly makes a compelling equity argument. The Whale Tail plate was created in 1997 and the formula that sends 50% of its *specialization* funds to the ELPF doesn't apply to specialty plates created after 2002.

On the other hand, while the bill will increase funding for coastal-related programs, it does so at the expense of other environmental programs funded by the ELPF.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee's analysis, the bill may result in an annual redirection of approximately \$3 million in annual Whale Tail License Plate revenues from the ELPF to the CBCEA.

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/5/26)

Outdoor Outreach (co-sponsor)	California Coastal Commission
Salted Roots (co-sponsor)	California Coastal Protection Network
TreePeople (co-sponsor)	California Coastkeeper Alliance
Amah Mutsun Land Trust	California Marine Sanctuary
Amigos De Bolsa Chica	Foundation
Amigos De Los Rios	California Urban Streams Alliance
Association for Environmental and	Catalina Island Marine Institute
Outdoor Education	Children's Lifesaving Foundation
Audubon California	City Surf Project
Audubon Center At Debs Park	Climate Resilient Communities
Azul	Clockshop
BIPOC Support Foundation	Coastal Corridor Alliance
Black Surf Santa Cruz, INC	Coastal Watershed Council
Black Surfers Collective	Coastside Land Trust
BORP Adapted Sports and Recreation	Community Action Partnership of
California Academy of Sciences	Kern

Concerned Resource &
Environmental Workers
Conservation Corps North Bay
Crossing the Channel for CAUSE
Crystal Cove Conservancy
D.I.Y. Art
DIVERSEAFY
Ege Foundation (Eternal Generations
Emerging)
EmpowHer
Environmental Action Committee of
West Marin
Environmental Center of San Diego
Environmental Traveling Companions
(ETC)
Escondido Creek Conservancy
Friends of Ballona Wetlands
Friends of Sausal Creek
Friends of the Dunes
GirlVentures
Golden Gate Bird Alliance
Grassroots Ecology
Green Latinos
Groundwork San Diego Chollas
Creek
Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Center
Guided Discoveries, INC.
Heal the Bay
Hills for Everyone
Humboldt Waterkeeper
Justice Outside
Keep Coyote Creek Beautiful
Kids for the Bay
Land Trust of Napa County
Latino Outdoors
Literacy for Environmental Justice
Living Coast Discovery Center
Los Angeles Neighborhood Land
Trust
Los Courage Camps

Marshmallow Minds
Mendocino Area Parks Association
Monarch School Project
Nature for All
New Heights Charter School
Northern California Public Media
Oakland Goes Outdoors
Ocean Discovery Institute
One Cool Earth
Outside the Lens
Paddle for Peace
Para Los Ninos
Payomkawichum Kaamalam
Planning and Conservation League
Plants People Community
Project Avary
Queer Surf
Ready Study Go Academy
Redwood Community Action Agency
Reel Guppy Outdoors
Resource Renewal Institute
Resources for Indian Student
Education, INC.
River Jim Learning Solutions
Rosie the Riveter Trust
Sacramento Urban Forest Council
Salinas Community Science
Workshop
Salmon River Restoration Council
San Diego Children and Nature
Santa Cruz Mountains Trail
Stewardship
Save Our Shores
Save the Waves Coalition
Sierra Club Inspiring Connections
Outdoors
Sacramento Smith River Alliance
Sonoma County Parks Foundation
Sonoma County Regional Parks
South Yuba River Citizens League

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods
Sunday Friends Foundation
Surfrider Foundation
Sustainable Claremont
Ten Strands
Tides Center
Trees Foundation
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Un Mar De Colores

Undauntedk12
Ventana Wilderness Alliance
Ventana Wildlife Society
Ventura Land Trust
Watsonville Wetlands Watch
Wholly H2O
WILDCOAST
Yes Nature to Neighborhoods
YMCA of Greater San Francisco

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/5/26)

None received

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 5/26/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Muratsuchi, Celeste Rodriguez

Prepared by: Evan Goldberg / N.R. & W. / (916) 651-4116
8/14/26 9:58:06

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