
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 2734
Author: Hart (D)
Amended: 8/26/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

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

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

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 re-directs funds raised through the sale and renewal of two special interest license plates.

Senate Floor amendments of 8/26/26 inserted a trigger mechanism before the funding formula in this bill can take effect and creates a separate guaranteed stream of funding for certain programs.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Environmental License Plate Fund (ELPF), a depository for money collected from the sale and renewal of special interest license plates to fund various natural resources and environmental protection programs.
- 2) Allows 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.

- 3) Requires the DMV, after deducting its administrative costs, to evenly split money raised from issuing the Whale Tail special interest license plates into California Beach and Coastal Enhancement Account (CBCEA) inside the ELPF and the ELPF itself. Of the funds given to the CBCEA, the money is allocated to certain programs. After that, any remaining funds are allocated to the State Coastal Conservancy for coastal restoration and enhancement projects.

This bill:

- 1) Specifies that in years when money collected from the sale or renewal of Whale Tail special interest license plates meets or exceeds the money collected in the prior year and there is money to fund a “prudent reserve” of 5%, then the following new funding formula will be applied to money collected beyond that “floor plus prudent reserve”:
 - 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 grant program.
- 2) Re-directs 10% of the money designed to go to the ELPF from the 49ers Foundation special interest license plate to the California Coastal Commission to fund the Whale Tail Grants Program, the Adopt-A-Beach program, the Coastal Cleanup Day program, and other coastal education programs.
- 3) Re-directs 10% of the money designed to go to the ELPF from the 49ers Foundation special interest license plate to the California Coastal Conservancy to fund the Conservancy’s Explore the Coast grant program.
- 4) Re-directs 20% of the money designed to go to the ELPF from the 49ers Foundation special interest license plate to fund the Outdoor Equity Grants Program run by California State Parks.

Background

ELPF. The 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 special interest 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.

Follow The Money. When a driver gets a personalized, special interest license plate for their vehicle, they're paying two fees: (1) The cost of the special interest license plate; and (2) The cost for personalizing the plate

The money from the *personalization* fee attached to all of the state's special interest 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 or renewed, 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). Meanwhile, the 49ers Foundation plate is scheduled to send 75% of money it raises to the ELPF, with 25% going to the 49ers Foundation.

Comments

Purpose of the bill. According to the author, "California's coast belongs to all of us, but too many Californians still face barriers to accessing and enjoying it. AB 2734 will strengthen the Whale Tail and Explore the Coast grant programs by directing new license plate revenue toward coastal education, outdoor experiences, and opportunities for communities that have historically had less access to our coast. This bill will help ensure more Californians can experience, learn about, and care for the coast."

Why Is Money Tied To The 49ers Foundation Plate Being Chosen For Re-Direction? The 49er Foundation is the newest special interest license plate that only began being issued in late 2025, meaning a full year's worth of funding has yet to be collected. As such, this proposal doesn't "take money away" from the ELPF that it has been getting previously. Instead, it means the ELPF will be getting less money than it may have been counting on from the sale of the 49ers Foundation license plate.

How Much Money Are We Talking About? Generally speaking, a special interest license plate costs \$50 or \$103 for a personalized plate (\$3 is an administrative fee). Annual renewal fees are \$40 and \$83. With the 49ers Foundation plate, 75%

of the total funds raised are scheduled to go to the ELPF and 25% will go to the 49ers Foundation.

As a practical matter, this bill's trigger mechanism is likely to result in \$0 money being re-directed away from the ELPF for the foreseeable future. That's because while the Whale Tail plate is the state's second most popular special interest license plate, the money it brings in has been flat or declining for the past nine years.

Before a special interest license plate can be issued, a minimum of 7,500 plates must be ordered by drivers. So, if 7,500 drivers pay the \$100 (not counting the \$3 administrative fee) for a personalized 49ers Foundation special interest license plate, it will raise \$562,500 for the ELPF (75% of \$750,000).

This bill directs 10% of that money (\$56,250) to the Coastal Commission, 10% (\$56,250) to the Coastal Conservancy, and 20% (\$112,500) to the Outdoor Equity Grants Program, leaving \$337,500 for the ELPF.

Obviously if more 49ers Foundation plates are sold and renewed, more money will be raised for each of these programs.

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

SUPPORT: (Based On Prior Version of this Bill)

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

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
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