



LICENSE PLATE REVENUE GENERATES MILLIONS



A specialty vehicle license plate revenue program in Florida delivered more than \$4 million to the Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program during its first seven years, and now generates about \$400,000 per year, providing a sustainable source of continuing funding.

THE NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM IN ACTION

Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program

Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program (IRLNEP), sponsored by the St. Johns River Water Management District, led the development and management of the program, supported by 12,000 vehicle owners and dedicated stakeholders. Their success is a lesson in strategic collaboration that can be transferred and adapted to community-based programs elsewhere:

- Petitions identify a support base. IRLNEP collected petitions (with the help of McDonald's franchises located throughout the watershed) containing the signatures of 12,000 registered Florida vehicle owners who

agreed they would purchase the specialty plate when available.

- Elected officials get on the team. Endorsements from constituents helped position the program with regional elected officials who agreed to sponsor a bill to create the specialty plate in both the House and Senate in an upcoming legislative session.

- It takes money to make money. With so much positive support, IRLNEP felt confident in paying a \$15,000 one-time administration fee to the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and investing the time to develop the short and long-term market-

ing strategies that were required by the DMV.

But all of that start-up work was only the beginning of the outreach effort, as the IRLNEP would also be responsible for promotion of the license plate program and for management of the grant program that would be supported by the revenues. The team was able to secure several corporate partners who would be essential to the effort. The Anheuser Busch Corporation donated \$15,000 to help pay for the production and labor costs of more than 70 billboard advertisements, and the Florida Outdoor Advertising Association do-



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nated \$60,000 worth of billboard advertising space. For three months, a local car dealership helped seed the program by providing all new car buyers with Indian River Lagoon license plates.

For each Lagoon license plate sold or renewed, IRLNEP receives \$15 and, of that, at least 80 percent of the proceeds are used to support stormwater retrofit and/or habitat restoration projects, with up to 20 percent allocated to environmental education projects focusing on the lagoon. License plate revenues do not support salaries, studies, or other administrative costs. Habitat restoration projects supported by the license plate program have included the reconnection of impounded salt marshes, shoreline stabilization, spoil island and mangrove restoration, and stormwater treatment retrofits.

Environmental education projects have included exhibits, videos, and support for lagoon learning centers.

Competition from more than 100 other specialty license plate designs offered for sale in Florida has been fierce, but the strength of the IRLNEP license plate design, combined with a strategic marketing campaign, has the lagoon plate ranked at number 17 on the list of specialty plates available. The design features a snook—a local fish—which appeals to a niche market of anglers throughout the state. Plus, current marketing strategies include direct mail promotions to plate owners, with targeted advertising in regional and statewide angler magazines.

Visit www.sjrwmd.com/itsyourlagoon to learn more about this and other IRLNEP efforts.

EPA's National Estuary Program (NEP) is a unique and successful coastal watershed-based program established in 1987 under the Clean Water Act Amendments. The NEP involves the public and collaborates with partners to protect, restore, and maintain the water quality and ecological integrity of 28 estuaries of national significance located in 18 coastal states and Puerto Rico.

For more information about the NEP go to www.epa.gov/owow/estuaries.