

## Environmental license plates help protect, preserve Indiana land

By Gabrielle Reed Special to the Hoosier Times  
0/0/

You've surely spotted them on the rear bumpers of Chevys, Fords and especially on such environmentally friendly cars as the Prius or Volt those distinctive blue license plates, complete with soaring bald eagle against a setting sun.

Each one of the specialty plates translates into preservation of \$25 worth of the Hoosier landscape.

The plate, which in 1992 became the first vanity license plate permitted in Indiana, costs motorists \$40, of which the Indiana Department of Motor Vehicles keeps \$15 to cover handling costs.

The remainder is turned over to the Indiana Heritage Trust Foundation and its project committee, made up of one resident from each Indiana congressional district along with a representative from each of six divisions of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources.

The committee meets quarterly to review proposals to fund projects, mostly land acquisitions, with ideas coming from the natural resources department or from conservation groups, local government, private companies and just plain folks.

Some plate proceeds are designated for specific uses, such as support or expansion of fish and wildlife areas and facilities to maintenance of archeological sites to stewardship of the land. A large chunk 50 percent of the total is discretionary, with all proposals going before the 17-member Trust Committee, which includes the state treasurer, the 12-member Heritage Trust board and members of the Indiana House and Senate.

The governor then finally signs off on all land purchases.

The fund has so far paid for more than 56,000 acres of Indiana land, including nature preserves, additions to state parks and forests, historic sites and outdoor recreation areas.

An important component in a decision to fund a particular project is how much matching money or value is available through donations, other grants and federal funds, and can come in dollars or real estate.

We leverage money the best that we can and utilize funding sources to make our money go further so we try to get as many partners as we can in many of the projects, 242464375 Indiana Heritage Trust 437's Nick Heinzeleman said.

Applicants compete for the money through a formal application process that makes its way through the committees and finally to the governor's desk.

The Bloomington-based Sycamore Land Trust has won grants totaling \$140,000 through the Heritage fund, which assisted in the purchases of parts of Trevlac Bluffs Nature Preserve in Brown County and Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve in Monroe County.

But as a growing number of nonprofit groups have turned to the sale of specialty license plates to support their causes, Heritage Trust revenue from its own plate has declined.

In its best years, the plate was accounting for more than \$2 million annually 63951716 in 1996, the Heritage Trust collected \$2,138,500.

But as more and more specialty plates, each with their own causes and supporters, were permitted over the years, the conservation plate has declined in popularity, with sales falling from a high of 85,540 in 1996 to a low of 46,258 in 2011, the last year records were available.

Specialty plates cost significantly more than standard plates, as well, and I think there are only so many people who are willing to spend that much money for a license plate, 59195 said Lynn Dennis, director of government relations for The Nature Conservancy, one of the groups that has turned to the Heritage trust for funding.

Christian Freitag, executive director of Sycamore Land Trust, agrees that conservation plate dollars aren't flowing as they once did.

55488248 It has seen better days and is no longer in the heyday of its funding prime, but it has allowed us to do some really wonderful projects, Freitag said.

Even with the revenue decline, Lynn Dennis, director of government relations for The Nature Conservancy, still has hope in the program, and argues the cause is that deserves solid support.

We are hopeful that we are going to grow the awareness of the value of protecting natural lands, 63951716 Dennis said. We have some really high quality natural lands that need to be protected and whether that happens through the Bicentennial Nature Trust or something like that or the (Indiana) Heritage Trust, it doesn't really matter as long as we do focus on the fact that we have things that should be protected. 2388502

#### 4 A CAUSE



#### 4 A CAUSE

