



New license plates to help West Virginia's diverse wildlife

West Virginia has rich and diverse wildlife. To help showcase and preserve it, the Division of Natural Resources recently added two decorative license plates for state motorists. "We're excited to add the new license plates to the ones already offered," said Scott Warner, assistant chief of Wildlife Diversity. "Decorative license plates are popular with West Virginia drivers, who have a common pride in the wildlife we all enjoy."

Available at any Division of Motor Vehicles office, the new plates feature a native brook trout or an Eastern bluebird. The cost of each plate is \$55 for the first year, with renewals for subsequent years at \$45. You also can order one of the decorative plates by mail when renewing your vehicle registration.

Like the other DNR plates, part of the revenue from the new ones will help fund the agency's Wildlife Diversity Program. Of the initial \$55, \$10 goes to DNR. When renewed, \$15 of the \$45 goes to the agency. This financial donation was made possible by an amendment to the Constitution of West Virginia approved by a majority of the voting public in 1998.

Wildlife Diversity staff have used funds from license plate sales to print publications on threatened and endangered species, how to identify the various reptiles and amphibians found in the state, and how to plant a butterfly garden, among other topics. Another popular program aided by the license plate revenue is wildlife education trunks full of educational materials and activities which can be checked out by schools. Trunks have been developed on bats, birds, and mammals and are available from the DNR Elkins office. Funds have also been used to research and monitor various wildlife species for which people don't hunt or fish. Several

interactive displays have been developed which staff use in schools and at various events. License plate sales have also been used to develop and maintain the DNR's Master Naturalist Program. This program trains volunteers who become certified to provide educational presentations to the public.

According to Warner, the license plate program has collected almost \$5.2 million since it started in 1999. "The sale of decorative license plates generates approximately \$350,000 a year," he said. "With more plates to choose from, we hope to increase that amount and provide more funds for the Wildlife Diversity Program."

If the art on the new plates seems familiar, it should. The late Tom Allen, who served as a wildlife research biologist for DNR from 1970 to 2003, painted the two new plates, as well as plates featuring a rose-breasted grosbeak, a white-tailed deer buck and a black bear with a cub. During his career at DNR, Allen researched deer, black bears, woodcocks, raccoons and other wildlife in West Virginia. He also had a number of outside interests. In addition to painting, he also enjoyed photography, collecting fossils, beekeeping, gardening and writing.

"Tom Allen had many talents and served the DNR in numerous ways for many years," Warner said. "His paintings have appeared in many agency calendars, and his work continues to inspire appreciation for the state's wildlife."

Additional information about the new wildlife plates is available by calling the DMV at 1-800-642-9066 or by visiting the DMV website at www.dmv.wv.gov and clicking the special plate's link.