

California Tahoe Conservancy  
Agenda Item 7.b  
March 16, 2017

## **STATUS OF LAKE TAHOE LICENSE PLATE SALES AND MARKETING**

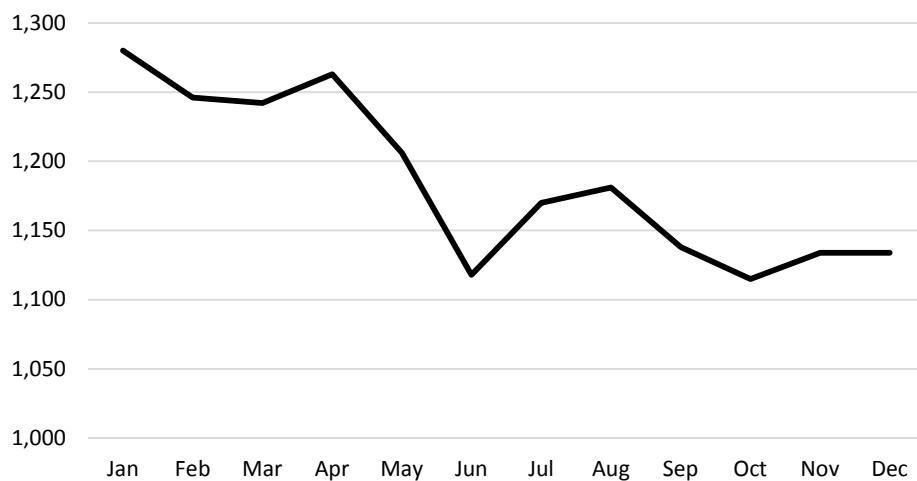
The California Tahoe Conservancy's (Conservancy) special interest environmental license plate program began in 1992. The Lake Tahoe License Plate (License Plate) is one of twelve special interest license plates available in California. Funds collected from License Plate sales are allocated to the Conservancy and are statutorily required to support "preservation and restoration projects in the Lake Tahoe area" and for "establishing and improving trails, pathways, and public access for nonmotorized traffic." (Veh. Code, § 5075, subd. (c).)

License Plate revenue provides a predictable and important source of revenue for the Conservancy. The State of Nevada has a similar Lake Tahoe License Plate that provides funds to the Nevada Division of State Lands for environmental improvement projects on the Nevada side of the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Conservancy currently contracts with SDBX Studio, LLC through a two-year private consultant services contract of up to \$240,000 to provide marketing and promotion of License Plates. The purpose of the marketing contract is to: a) increase new License Plate sales and renewals; b) increase awareness of the License Plate and the types of projects that License Plate fees support; and c) build public-private partnerships in support of the Conservancy and License Plate sales.

Several campaigns and marketing efforts support these goals. The most successful campaign, the annual "Plates for Powder" promotion, began in December 2011. This campaign occurs in partnership with the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association and Tahoe Fund and provides two free lift tickets for every new License Plate purchased from November to April. Print, social media, and website advertising efforts throughout the winter months drive the campaign. Attachment 1 shows an example of a Plates for Powder ad that ran in multiple print publications this winter. The chart below demonstrates the ability of the Plates for Powder campaign to stimulate License Plate sales during the winter months.

### Total License Plate Sales By Month (2012-16)



In addition to the Plates for Powder campaign, SDBX Studio, in partnership with Tahoe Fund, also manages the "Plate Spotter" campaign and "Tahoe License Plate Appreciation Days" to encourage License Plate renewals and increase awareness of the License Plate. The Plate Spotter campaign enters existing License Plate owners into a bi-weekly drawing to win free lift tickets. Plate Appreciation Days have included thank you events at Northstar and Squaw Valley at which License Plate owners received valet parking, lunch, and/or goodie bags, as well as a day of free parking at Sand Harbor State Park in the summer.

During the summer, SDBX Studio purchases advertisements in local and regional newspapers, magazines, and visitor guides aimed at increasing awareness of License Plates and the projects that fees support. Attachment 2 is an example of a summertime print advertisement.

Over the last five years, annual revenue to the Conservancy from License Plate sales and renewals is:

Fiscal Year	Revenue
2011-12	\$1,172,000
2012-13	\$1,108,000
2013-14	\$1,111,000
2014-15	\$1,070,000
2015-16	\$991,000

As seen above, sales for new License Plates and renewals are trending downward. A slowing economy and increased competition with the addition of more specialized

license plates may be contributing to the decline. For instance, the California Department of Motor Vehicles began selling a new specialty license plate called the “California Legacy Plate” in 2015 and it has already sold more than 230,000 license plates, by far the most of any specialty plate in the State. By comparison, there are approximately 23,000 Lake Tahoe, 33,000 Yosemite Conservancy, and 66,000 Coastal Commission license plates currently in circulation. Conservancy staff are working with SDBX Studio to identify ways to increase License Plate sales through existing and new marketing campaigns.

### **Plates for Projects Campaign**

In an effort to increase License Plate sales during the summer, Conservancy staff and SDBX Studio are initiating a new campaign called “Plates for Projects.” The Plates for Projects campaign will promote the sale of new License Plates by partnering with one or more local organizations to fund environmental projects and promote both the project(s) and License Plate sales.

The campaign seeks to capitalize on the ability for organizations to promote License Plates to their members and supporters by linking License Plate sales with their own projects. At the conclusion of the campaign, Conservancy staff will seek Board authorization to provide grant funding for the project(s). Projects must be consistent with the statutory requirements of the Lake Tahoe License Plate Program. Conservancy staff expect that these will be small grants with funding amounts of approximately \$7,000 to \$20,000 per project.

Summertime marketing materials will promote the campaign by highlighting the project(s), the partner organizations, and the benefits of owning a License Plate. In addition to supporting environmental projects on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, the campaign will increase awareness of the License Plates and provide publicity for partner organizations. If successful, Conservancy staff intends to make the Plates for Projects campaign an annual summertime effort.

### **List of Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Plates for Powder ad, winter 2016/17

Attachment 2 – Summertime License Plate ad, 2016

### **Conservancy Staff Contact:**

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## ATTACHMENT 1

# SKI OR RIDE FOR FREE



Purchase a CA or NV Tahoe license plate and get **two free Alpine or Nordic tickets** to the Tahoe resort of your choice\*. Now you can play in some deep powder without having to dig deep to make a difference. Your modest commitment will help fund hiking and biking paths, and water quality and restoration projects in the Lake Tahoe Basin. For more information or to purchase your license plate online, visit [TAHOEPLATES.COM](http://TAHOEPLATES.COM).

ELYSE SAUGSTAD  
& CODY TOWNSEND  
Professional Freeride Skiers

\*restrictions apply

# ARE YOU TRUE BLUE?



## SHOW IT. BUY OR RENEW A TAHOE LICENSE PLATE.

If the tall trees on shore act as your compass, the blue horizon offers an infinite sense of optimism, and the Lake anchors you, then you might be True Blue. But to make it crystal clear, you'll have to purchase or renew a Lake Tahoe license plate. More than 96% of your fee will help fund hiking and biking paths as well as water quality and restoration projects in the Basin. For more information visit: [www.tahoeplates.com](http://www.tahoeplates.com).



A simple way  
to make  
Tahoe better.