



# AUDITOR GENERAL

DAVID W. MARTIN, CPA



## DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAY SAFETY AND MOTOR VEHICLES

### PROPOSED SPECIALTY LICENSE PLATES

### 2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Operational Audit

**SUMMARY**

The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (Department) submitted completed scientific sample surveys to the Auditor General for the following six proposed specialty license plates:

- Visit Our Lights;
- Preserving the Past;
- Play Tennis;
- Save Wild Florida;
- Trinity; and
- Confederate Heritage.

For each of these proposed specialty plates, the Department reported that the requesting organizations had met the survey requirements of Section 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, and concluded that at least 30,000 Florida motor vehicle owners intended to purchase a specialty license plate.

Based on our audit, we determined that for these six proposed specialty license plates, the Department complied with the provisions of Section 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, and relevant Department procedures related to the conduct and evaluation of scientific sample surveys of Florida motor vehicle owners.

**BACKGROUND**

Section 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, specifies the requirements that must be met by organizations requesting the establishment of specialty license plates

for which an annual use fee is to be charged. Such an organization must submit to the Department the results of a scientific sample survey of Florida motor vehicle owners. The survey results must indicate at least 30,000 motor vehicle owners intend to purchase the proposed specialty license plate at the increased cost. The Statute defines the term scientific sample survey, as information that is gathered from a representative subset of the population as a whole.

The Statute requires that the scientific sample survey be performed independently of the requesting organization by an organization that conducts similar sample surveys as a normal course of business. Prior to conducting a sample survey for the purposes of the Statute, a requesting organization must obtain a determination from the Department that the organization selected to conduct the survey performs similar surveys as a normal course of business and is independent of the requesting organization.

To implement the requirements in Statute, the Department established written procedures<sup>1</sup> governing the creation of new specialty license plates. In support of those procedures, the Department entered into a contract with the University of West Florida (Contractor) under which the Contractor is to statistically analyze the data collected by the survey organization and provide the Department with a

<sup>1</sup> Procedure RS-20, Creation of a New Specialty License Plate.

report that indicates: (1) based on the data, at least 30,000 Florida motor vehicle owners intend to purchase the specialty license plate; or (2) based on the data, less than 30,000 Florida motor vehicle owners intend to purchase the specialty license plate.

Pursuant to Section 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, the methodology, results, and any evaluation by the Department of the scientific sample survey shall be validated by the Auditor General as a condition precedent to submission of the specialty license plate for approval by the Legislature.

To accomplish the validation required by law, we evaluated for each of the six proposed specialty license plates submitted to us, the extent to which the Department demonstrated its compliance with governing provisions of law and Department procedures. Our validation of the Department’s compliance with the survey requirements does not ensure sales at the projected levels, as the surveys measure public interest, and such interest may not be reflected in the actual sales of specialty license plates.

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**FINDINGS**

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The Department submitted the completed scientific sample surveys to the Auditor General for the following six proposed specialty license plates:

- Visiting Our Lights;
- Preserving the Past;
- Play Tennis;
- Save Wild Florida;
- Trinity; and
- Confederate Heritage.

In transmittal letters to the Auditor General for each of these six proposed specialty license plates, the Department reported that its procedures relating to survey methodology had been followed and concluded that the requesting organizations had met the survey requirements in the Statute. The Department’s conclusion was, in part, based on reports of its Contactor that indicated, based on the results of surveys, at least 30,000 Florida motor vehicle owners

intended to purchase the proposed specialty license plates.

Based on our audit, we determined that for these six proposed specialty license plates, the Department complied with the provisions of Section 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, and relevant Department procedures related to the conduct and evaluation of scientific sample surveys of Florida motor vehicle owners.

The Department also received completed scientific sample surveys for three additional proposed specialty license plates (I Believe, Florida Horse Country, and In God We Trust). With respect to these three proposed specialty license plates, the Department concluded that the scientific sample surveys did not meet the requirements of Section 320.08053, Florida Statutes.

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**OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY**

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In accordance with the provisions of Section 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, we examined the methodology, results, and the Department’s evaluation of the scientific sample survey for each of the six proposed specialty license plates within the scope of this audit.

The purpose of our audit was to determine the Department’s compliance with provisions of Section 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, which govern the conduct and evaluation of specialty license plate scientific sample surveys, and relevant Department procedures. In conducting our audit, we interviewed Department personnel, examined records, evaluated the effectiveness of related Department procedures, re-performed statistical analyses, and performed various other procedures as deemed necessary in the circumstances.

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**AUTHORITY**

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Pursuant to the provisions of Sections 11.45 and 320.08053(1)(b), Florida Statutes, I have directed that this report be prepared to present the results of our operational audit.



David W. Martin, CPA  
Auditor General

Operational audits are conducted to promote accountability in government and improvement in government operations. This operational audit was conducted in accordance with applicable *Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards*. This audit was conducted by Marcella Strange, CPA, and supervised by David R. Vick, CPA, Audit Manager.

Please address inquiries regarding this report to David R. Vick, CPA, Audit Manager, by e-mail at ([davidvick@aud.state.fl.us](mailto:davidvick@aud.state.fl.us)) or by telephone (850-487-4494). This report and audit reports prepared by the Auditor General can be obtained on our Web site (<http://www.myflorida.com/audgen>); by telephone (850-487-9024); or by mail (G74 Claude Pepper Building, 111 West Madison Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1450).

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