

Lawmaker pushes for Maniacs plate

Rep. Paul Shepherd says Orofino school mascot has lots of fans

William L. Spence/Lewiston Tribune

BOISE - The first specialty license plate bill of the year was introduced in the Idaho House Transportation Committee Thursday afternoon, honoring the Orofino High School Maniacs.

Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, sponsored the measure. He noted the Maniacs have a tremendous fan base in the Clearwater Valley.

"They came up with the idea of having a license plate with the school mascot on it, and it had great support," he said.

Shepherd introduced a similar bill last session. It never received a hearing, but he thinks this one has a good chance of advancing.

House Transportation Committee Chairman Joe Palmer, R-Meridian, noted that he visited Orofino last summer and every time he turned around someone was telling him they wanted the plate.

"I didn't realize anyone up there even knew who I was," he said.

Idaho drivers already have their choice of at least 50 different specialty plates. Collectively, they generate about \$1.5 million per year for various organizations. The plates cost \$35 initially and \$25 for each renewal, with the sponsoring organization collecting a portion of the fee.

Shepherd said money from the Maniacs plate would go to the Clearwater Community Foundation to pay for various youth programs.

If approved, it would open up an entirely new category of "school spirit" license plates. Historically, specialty plates have generated funds for state or regional organizations, such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation or colleges and universities.

Before an organization even proposes legislation requesting a new plate, it must submit a financial plan to the Idaho Transportation Department, along with a list of at least 250 vehicle owners who have committed to purchasing the new design. After a three-year introductory period, at least 1,000 plates must be sold in every subsequent two-year period or the design will be discontinued.

Rep. Phylis King, D-Boise, noted that some mental health advocates and people with mental illness objected to Shepherd's bill last year. She wondered if anything was done to avoid that this time.

Shepherd said it's the same plate design as last year. It doesn't have any wording, but shows the Maniacs mascot - a fan with lots of hair jumping up and down. He said the state mental hospital in Orofino isn't opposed to the proposal.

"They love their Maniacs and are very proud of them," Shepherd said.

The bill was introduced on a voice vote, with King objecting.

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