

Oregon coast lawmakers want gray whale license plate

By [Christian Gaston, The Oregonian](#)

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SALEM -- Oregon offers 35 different license plates celebrating local treasures such as Crater Lake, wine country and Oregon State University.

If Oregon coast lawmakers get their way this year, one more iconic Oregon creature will join the ranks of the OSU beaver: the gray whale.

[Rep. David Gomberg, D-Otis](#), said [House Bill 2180](#), would establish a new commemorative whale plate which drivers could buy for an extra \$30 per year. The fee would fund OSU's Marine Mammal Institute, boosting gray whale research and tourism.

"I call it a coastal plate because it promotes the coast," Gomberg said. "But I think it has broader appeal."

Gomberg should know. His district stretches from the Suislaw National Forest south of Newport to southern Tillamook. The coastal cities he represents bank on tourism to bolster their economy. And some cities, like tiny Depoe Bay, also bank on gray whales.

"They call it the whale-watching capitol of the world," Gomberg said.

Commemorative license plates have hit the skids in the past in Salem. Former Sen. Rick Metsger championed a bill in 2003 to limit specialty license plates. But just six years later, Metsger worked to establish a plate celebrating Oregon's 150th birthday.

The lure of the plate is strong.

Other bills introduced this session would allow plates commemorating [professional sports teams](#), plates that raise money for [wildlife conservation](#) and plates featuring [Smokey the Bear](#).

But it takes an act of the Legislature to establish a new plate and driving a bill to the floor isn't as easy as it sounds.

Gomberg said the whale plate cause has strong support among the Legislature's coastal caucus and fundraising led by OSU would cover the cost of getting the plate up and running.

Now all he needs is for the bill to get a hearing in the [House Transportation and Economic Development Committee](#).

That may be a whale of a task.

"We've got a lot of other stuff to do," said [Rep. Tobias Read, D-Beaverton](#), who chairs the committee. "We've got a lot of license plates."

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