(27) FLORIDA WILDFLOWER LICENSE PLATES.

(a) The department shall develop a Florida Wildflower license plate as provided in this section. The word "Florida" must appear at the top of the plate, and the words "State Wildflower" and "coreopsis" must appear at the bottom of the plate.

(b) The annual use fees shall be distributed to the Florida Wildflower Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit corporation under s. 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The proceeds must be used to establish native Florida wildflower research programs, wildflower educational programs, and wildflower grant programs to municipal, county, and community-based groups in this state.

1. **The Florida Wildflower Foundation, Inc.**, shall develop procedures of operation, research contracts, education and marketing programs, and wildflower planting grants for Florida native wildflowers, plants, and grasses.

2. A maximum of 15 percent of the proceeds from the sale of such plates may be used for administrative and marketing costs.

3. If the Florida Wildflower Foundation, Inc., ceases to be an active nonprofit corporation under s. 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, the proceeds from the annual use fee shall be deposited into the General Inspection Trust Fund created within the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Any funds held by the Florida Wildflower Foundation, Inc., must be promptly transferred to the General Inspection Trust Fund. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services shall use and administer the proceeds from the use fee in the manner specified in this paragraph.
INTRODUCTION

In the 500 years since Ponce de Leon christened our peninsula "La Florida," native wildflowers have struggled to co-exist with the pressures of progress. As the state's natural landscape has been increasingly threatened by development, some species have vanished altogether. Still others have been classified as endangered or threatened.

The Florida Wildflower Foundation's mission is to enrich lives with Florida's native wildflowers. Through the sale of the State Wildflower license tag, the organization increases the visibility and availability of native wildflowers and grasses by funding research, education and planting projects statewide.

Since 2000, the $15 donation from each State Wildflower license plate sale to:

- Provide more than $2 million for native wildflower education, research and planting projects.
- Spur the development of the wildflower seed industry by supporting the Florida Wildflower Seed and Plant Growers Association.
- Support Florida's native nursery industry by increasing demand for flowering native species.
- Build awareness and knowledge of native wildflowers and plants.
- Support highway beautification through widespread wildflower seeding and planting projects.
- Promote wildflower tourism and its enormous economic benefits.
- Partner with like-minded agencies and organizations to support programs such as the Florida Forever land preservation effort.

Ultimately, the Foundation seeks to build a center for wildflower research and education that conveys to visitors and residents the beauty of wildflowers and their roles in Florida's diverse habitats. To support its research effort, the Foundation in 2007 established the Gary Henry Research Endowment Fund at the University of Florida. The endowment is in honor of the contributions made by the organization's first executive director. The Foundation is steered by a board of directors that includes representation from many of the organizations and agencies responsible for the creation of the State Wildflower license plate. They are:

- Florida Federation of Garden Clubs
- Florida Department of Transportation
- Florida Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects
- University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences
- Florida League of Cities
- Florida Master Gardeners
- Association of Florida Native Nurseries
- Florida Native Plant Society
- Wildflower Seed and Plant Growers Association Inc.
1925: In Jacksonville, the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs (FFGC) is established. The first committee established was the Billboard Committee.

1927: Adoption of the Federation’s “Highway Resolution” supporting legislation calling for a 100 ft right of way on all state and county roads.

1929: FFGC endorses establishment of Florida Arbor Day

1930's: national recognition... “...roadsides are the nation’s front yard. What is really desired is attractive and useful roadsides.... To follow a natural development is outright economy of roadside maintenance.”

1947: FFGC supports passage of the Blue Star Highway bill, and the state’s first plant protection law.

1948: F. Elgin Bayless, chairman of the road department said, ”... the state has spent $663,000 in the past three years on highway beautification.”

1950's: It becomes fashionable to utilize an agricultural approach; spraying and mowing. Road departments surmise this is what the public wants and expects.

1953: FFGC “sponsors” bill to designate the sabal palm as the state tree.

1960: Six FFGC members serve on Governor’s Committee for Roadside Improvement and Safety.

1963: FDOT establishes Wildflower Program

1965: US Highway Beautification Act

1966: FFGC and FDOT dedicate gateway planting at US17 State line

1970: The world celebrates the first Earth Day

1973: FHWA initiates “Operation Wildflower” in cooperation with state highway agencies and the National Council of State Garden Clubs, Inc.

1974: Operation Wildflower is incorporated into roadside area programs

1981: FDOT Bureau of Environmental and the Office of Materials and Research publishes Management of Roadside Vegetation Along Highway Rights of Way. “During the past several years interest has been directed toward the preservation and spread of wildflowers... but also to the reduction of mowing limits.”

1987: STURAA requires, “at least one-quarter of one percent of the funds expended for a landscaping project must be used to plant native wildflowers on the project.” ($100K/year)

1987: Florida Legislature establishes Florida Highway Beautification Council

1988: Governor Martinez appoints FFGC member to serve on Florida Highway Beautification Council

1989: FFGC establishes Paths of Sunshine Awards program

1989: FDOT Marianna Maintenance wins the first Paths of Sunshine Award

1994: FDOT publishes first of four editions of Wildflowers in Florida

1997: FDOT invests $30,000 for State Wildflower tag legislation

1997: FFGC collects 30,000 signatures for State Wildflower tag legislation

1999: Florida Legislature requires allocation of 1.5% ($40Million/Year)

1999: FDOT funds Florida’s first ecotype seed research

1999: Florida Legislature creates the State Wildflower tag
Ponce de León in Florida

Juan Ponce de León was the first Spanish explorer to arrive in Florida. Early Spanish explorers were known as conquistadors or "conquerors." While there are no official records, historians believe that Ponce de León was born in 1460 in San Tervas de Campos, Spain.

Early Exploration

In 1493, Ponce de León sailed with Christopher Columbus on Columbus's second voyage to the Americas. He and his family settled on an island in the Caribbean named Hispaniola (Dominican Republic). He became a military commander at this post and was appointed deputy governor.

In 1506, Ponce de León discovered a nearby island named Borinquen. While there, he found large deposits of gold. Soon after his discovery, he left the island. He returned in 1508 on orders from the king of Spain to explore and colonize the island. He renamed the island Puerto Rico. He was the island's governor for two years until the king replaced him with Columbus' son.

Discovery of Florida

Hurt by the King's action, Ponce de León sailed again, this time north through the Bahamas heading towards Florida. He was in search of new lands and treasures. He had also heard of a mythical fountain of youth. Indians spoke of a legendary, magical spring whose water was believed to make older people young again. Ponce de León explored many areas, including the Bahamas and Bimini, for both gold and the mythical fountain, but he never found either. In late March of 1513, his ships landed on Florida's east coast near present-day St. Augustine. He claimed this beautiful land for Spain. Since he had discovered this country of lavish landscape and beautiful beaches, he was entitled to name it. He named it La Florida (LAH flow REE dah) or "place of flowers."

He decided to continue his exploration of this land and sailed down the coast. He encountered some rough currents at one point and named the area Cape Canaveral which means "Cape of Currents".

Ponce de León continued down the east coast of Florida and along the keys until he arrived at an island that had many turtles. He named the island Dry Tortugas because there was no fresh water on the island and "tortugas" means "turtle" in Spanish.
Ponce de León and the Calusa Indians

Continuing up the west coast of Florida, Ponce de León entered the Charlotte Harbor area. As he and his men explored inland for wood and fresh water, they saw the Calusa tribal village at Mound Key. They discovered that the Calusa were an unfriendly tribe. The explorers fled back to their ships and decided to leave the area. They sailed back to Puerto Rico.

Return to Florida

In 1521, Ponce de León returned to Florida again to build a colony. He landed on the gulf beaches between Charlotte Harbor and Estero Bay with over 200 settlers, horses, tools, and seeds. The plan was to set up a farming colony. As they went inland for fresh water, the Calusa ambushed them. Ponce de León was shot in the thigh by an arrow and was seriously wounded. The settlers decided to abandon the settlement and sail back to Cuba.

As a result of his wound, Ponce de León died at the age of 61 in Cuba. He will always be remembered as the brave conquistador who first explored many parts of Florida and searched for the mythical fountain of youth.

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1966 Lady Bird Johnson, inaugurated a federal concept entitled The Beautification of America

1973 the Federal Highway Administration (FWHA) of the United States Department of Transportation established Operation Wildflower for Interstate Highways nationwide

1971 Florida began its official Wildflower Program

1987 Florida Federation of Garden Clubs, inc. began first initiative to collect signatures.

1996 the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), took the lead and brought together Keep Florida Beautiful, the Florida Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, Inc, the Lt. Governor's Office, the University of Florida; Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Think Beauty Foundation, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida League of Cities and the Florida Association of Counties in sponsoring an initiative for adoption of a state Wildflower License Plate.

1998 November, the group submitted 12,000 signatures in support of the proposal along with a check for $30,000 from the FDOT to the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

1999 June, the legislation creating the Florida Wildflower License Plate was passed. The Legislation placed the Florida Wildflower Advisory Council under Keep Florida Beautiful for utilization of its non-profit tax status.

2000 February, the Florida Cabinet approved the design.

2001 Florida Wildflower Foundation established as 501(c)3 non-profit

2002 Legislation submitted by the Senate Environmental Committee to abolish KFB and redirect the proceeds from the sales of the Wildflower License plate to the Florida Wildflower Foundation. Legislation did not pass.

2004 Legislation again submitted by the Senate Environmental Committee to abolish KFB and redirect the proceeds from the sales of the Wildflower License plate to the Florida Wildflower Foundation. Legislation did not pass.

2006 Legislation submitted a third time by the Senate Environmental Committee to abolish KFB and redirect the proceeds from the sales of the Wildflower License plate to the Florida Wildflower Foundation. Legislation passed and was effective as of July 1, 2007.