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ADOPT STATE WILDFLOWER

House Bill 4923 as introduced First Analysis (7-1-97)

Sponsor: Rep. Liz Brater
Committee: Regulatory Affairs

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Since Michigan became a state in 1837, it has adopted various objects, animals, and plants to serve as official state symbols. Michigan has a state flower (the apple blossom), a state bird (the robin), a state tree (the white pine), a state stone (the Petoskey Stone), a state gem (chlorastrolite, or the "Isle Royale Greenstone"), a state fish (the brook trout), a state soil (the Kalkaska soil series), and a state reptile (painted turtle). Just recently, Public Act 15 of 1997 designated the white-tailed deer as the state game mammal. However, Michigan has not as yet adopted a state wildflower.

The Dwarf Lake Iris (*Iris lacustris*) has been nominated as a candidate for designation as state wildflower by a number of botanical and nature groups. The Dwarf Lake Iris was first discovered on or near Mackinac Island in 1810 by a naturalist, Thomas Nuttall. Reportedly, ninety-five percent of the world's Dwarf Lake Iris plants are in Michigan. The plant grows along the Lake Michigan and Lake Huron shorelines of the southeastern segment of the Upper Peninsula and the northern tip of the lower peninsula. Outside of Michigan, the Dwarf Lake Iris has been found only along the shores of the Door Peninsula in Wisconsin, and Manitoulin Island and the Bruce Peninsula in Ontario, Canada. Described as a very pretty flower, the Dwarf Lake Iris has been designated as an endangered species. In light of the Dwarf Lake Iris being unique to Michigan, legislation has been proposed to designate the flower as the official state wildflower.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would designate the Dwarf Lake Iris (*Iris lacustris*) as the official state wildflower.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

Fiscal information is not available.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

State symbols play an important role in highlighting wildlife and natural resources in the state. Where some of Michigan's state symbols represent natural resources shared with other states, certain natural resources are unique to Michigan, such as the Petoskey Stone. As the Dwarf Lake Iris is virtually exclusive to Michigan shores, it is particularly suited for designation as the state wildflower. First discovered in the Mackinac Island area in 1810, the Dwarf Lake Iris grows along the northern shorelines of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. This small plant blooms in spring with vibrant purple flowers and is listed as an endangered species. Since the Dwarf Lake Iris can be viewed in five Michigan Nature Association nature preserves and at the P.H. Hoefft state park in Presque Isle County, designating the Dwarf Lake Iris as the state wildflower has the potential of generating an increase in ecotourism and boosting the economy in northern regions of the state. In short, state symbols should symbolize something special and unique about the state, and the Dwarf Lake Iris is Michigan's very special wildflower.

Against:

If a wildflower is adopted as a state symbol, it should be the white trillium. White trilliums are also on the endangered species list, and more people are familiar with them.

Response:

White trilliums are indeed beautiful flowers in their own right, but they are found in most states lying east of the Mississippi River and are already designated by several states and the province of Ontario in Canada as the official wildflower. No one else can claim the Dwarf Lake Iris as theirs because 95 percent of the flowers grow in Michigan. By designating the Dwarf Lake Iris as the official wildflower, attention would be drawn to the flower that would aid in affording the protection due to an endangered species. Plus, just as more mushroom lovers and bird watchers travel to those places where morels and rare birds (e.g. the Kirtland Warbler) are found, so will botanists, gardeners, and other nature lovers travel to northern Michigan to see this rare wildflower.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Nature Association supports the bill. (6-25-97)

The Michigan Natural Areas Council supports the bill. (6-16-97)

The Michigan Botanical Club supports the bill. (6-17-97)

The Michigan Environmental Council supports the bill. (6-24-97)

The University of Michigan Herbarium supports the bill. (3-18-97)

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