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ADOPT MARBLED SALAMANDER AS STATE AMPHIBIAN

House Bill 5946 as introduced First Analysis (5-7-02)

Sponsor: Rep. Doug Hart
**Committee: Conservation and Outdoor
Recreation**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Michigan currently has 14 designated state symbols. These symbols include the state flower (apple blossom), bird (robin), tree (white pine), stone (Petoskey stone), gem (chlorastrolite), fish (brook trout), soil (Kalkaska sand), reptile (painted turtle), game mammal (white-tailed deer), and wildflower (dwarf lake iris). In addition, there is a state flag, coat-of-arms, and seal. Recently, Public Act 192 of 2002 named the mastadon (*Mammut americanum*) as the official state fossil.

As part of a recent lesson, fourth grade students at Crestwood Elementary School in Rockford were learning the various state symbols. That prompted one precocious student to ask, "why isn't there a state amphibian?" The students then set out to create a new state symbol (the amphibian), and began researching possible choices. Eventually the children settled on the marbled salamander as the state amphibian. Prompted by the resilience and hard work of the fourth grade students, legislation has been introduced that would name the marbled salamander as the state amphibian.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5946 would create a new act that would designate the marbled salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*) as the official amphibian of the state.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

State Symbols. In recent years, there have been several legislative proposals to add other state symbols. These proposals include a state dog (golden retriever), children's book (The Legend of Sleeping Bear), plant (soybean), burger (the Cherry Burger), waltz ("The Wolverine Waltz), insect (green darner dragonfly), and agricultural insect (honeybee). Indeed, there have been several proposals to replace the robin as the official state bird with the black-capped chickadee or the Kirtland's warbler.

In addition, several other states have named official state amphibians. These include Arizona (Arizona tree frog), Alabama (red hills salamander), South Carolina (spotted salamander), Louisiana (green tree frog), Kansas (barred tiger salamander), New Hampshire (spotted newt), Tennessee (Tennessee cave salamander), Minnesota (northern leopard frog), Vermont (northern leopard frog), and Oklahoma (spotted newt). House Bill 565, recently introduced in the Ohio House of Representatives, would name the bullfrog as the state amphibian.

Marbled Salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*). Also known as the banded salamander, the marbled salamander is a member of the family Ambystomatidae. Adults often have black bodies with white or silver bands. Generally, the white bands are found on male salamanders, while the females tend to have silver bands.

The marbled salamander is predominantly found in the east-southeast portion of the United States, from southern New England to northern Florida, and west to southern Illinois, southeastern Oklahoma, and eastern Texas. The marbled salamander is also found in distinct areas in the southern perimeter of Lake Erie and Lake Michigan, as well as southwestern Missouri, and along the Ohio-Indiana border.

In Michigan, the marbled salamander has been found in Berrien, Van Buren, and Allegan counties. Effective March 20, 1999, pursuant to rule 299.1024, the marbled salamander was named to the Department of Natural Resources' list of threatened species. The species is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. In other areas, it is not considered to be a threatened species.

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FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill would have no fiscal impact on either the state or local units of government. (5-2-02)

ARGUMENTS:**For:**

For several years now, the marbled salamander has been on the DNR's list of threatened species. It is highly likely that the salamander will be placed on the endangered species list and, ultimately, become extinct. Designating the marbled salamander as the official state amphibian will raise the awareness of the animal's existence in the state.

Part of the reason the marbled salamander has been on the state's threatened species list, has been due to a decline in its habitat. The marbled salamander, like other amphibians, is very susceptible to dehydration. As such, the salamander often inhabits areas near ponds, streams, and damp woodlands. However, many have argued that the poor water quality in some parts of the state have adversely affected the salamander's habitat.

Designating the marbled salamander as the official state amphibian will educate everyone in the state – schoolchildren and adults alike – on the necessity for continued conservation and support for Michigan's natural resources. This will go beyond "saving" the marbled salamander. The state's natural resources play an important role in the state's economy and improve the quality of life for the residents of the state, and should continue to be protected.

Response:

The marbled salamander is only found in a limited area in the southwest part of the state. If there is to be an official state amphibian, perhaps it should be a species that is more indigenous to the state. Other salamanders that are found in greater parts of the state include the spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) and the blue spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*).

Against:

While it is a certainly unique learning experience and valuable lesson in civics for students to research a topic, testify on behalf of legislation, and follow the legislative process, many believe that the legislature's time and money would be better spent pursuing other, more substantive, policy initiatives.

POSITIONS:

Fourth grade students at Crestwood Elementary School in Rockford testified in support of the bill. (5-2-02)

Analyst: M. Wolf

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.