

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2155

As Reported by House Committee On:
State Government & Tribal Relations

Title: An act relating to the state dinosaur.

Brief Description: Designating the Sucasaurus rex as the official dinosaur of the state of Washington.

Sponsors: Representatives Morgan, Reeves, Pettigrew, Entenman, Kirby, Cody, Eslick, Appleton, Jenkin, Ormsby, Irwin, Shewmake, Slatter, Peterson, Fitzgibbon, Tharinger, Robinson, Jenkins, Santos, Wylie, Blake, Callan, Thai, Ryu, Frame, Gregerson, Doglio, Hudgins, Paul, Lovick, Stonier and Leavitt.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/15/20, 1/17/20 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Sucasaurus rex as the state dinosaur.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Gregerson, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Dolan, Hudgins and Mosbrucker.

Minority Report: Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Goehner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Smith.

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

Approximately 80 million years ago, dinosaurs roamed much of North America. Although it would still be another 12 million years before Tyrannosaurus rex (T. rex) emerged as one of the largest apex predators of the dinosaur kingdom, other tyrannosaurs were just starting to

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evolve. Tyrannosaurs were just one of many types of therapods: two-legged carnivores such as T. rex and Velociraptor that likely paved the way for birds.

When an 80-million-year-old therapod fossil was found in the San Juan Islands in April 2012 by a group of researchers from the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture in Seattle, it was the first dinosaur fossil discovered in Washington state. The fossil was classified as a piece of the therapod's left femur—about 17 inches of what scientists estimate would have been a 4-foot-long leg bone. The fossil was deposited in the Cedar District Formation (Formation). Scientists disagree on where this Formation was located when the therapod died; estimates range from Baja California, Mexico, to Northern California.

In any event, the therapod fossil likely immigrated to present-day Washington as the Formation traveled north tens-of-millions of years ago. The rock eventually became part of Sucia Island, an island in the San Juan Islands that today houses a state park accessible only by watercraft.

In the first academic paper describing the fossil, University of Washington paleontologist Christian Sidor and then-PhD student Brandon Peacock hypothesized that the therapod was likely a tyrannosaur, and they included images comparing the femur to that of a Daspletosaurus. As scientists lack enough of the therapod's bones to classify the species definitively, the therapod to which the femur fossil belonged has been nicknamed the *Suciasaurus rex* in recognition of the island where it was discovered.

Dinosaur fossils are rare in the Pacific Northwest because active tectonic plate boundaries nearby have resulted in significant geological turmoil. In addition, the dense development of cities in Western Washington has curtailed scientists' ability to dig for fossils. Washington has previously designated the Columbian mammoth as the state fossil. According to many scientists, the state bird—the willow (or American) goldfinch—is also considered a type of therapod. Twelve states and Washington D.C. have official state dinosaurs.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The *Suciasaurus rex* is the state dinosaur of Washington.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill corrects language in the intent section to clarify that scientific evidence is not sufficient to suggest the fossil is a *Daspletosaurus*, but it may be a species similar to *Daspletosaurus*. The substitute bill also clarifies the nature of the controversy regarding where the therapod lived when it was alive 80 million years ago.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill was proposed by Ms. Amy Cole's fourth grade class from Elmhurst Elementary in Parkland. Passing this bill is not just about the state dinosaur, but also about civic engagement and teaching students how a bill becomes a law. This bill shows the importance of student education and student voice. It was very exciting when the first dinosaur was found in Washington, and Washington State Parks is happy to be the caretaker of the park where it was discovered.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Morgan, prime sponsor; Logan Endres, Washington State School Directors' Association; and Lisa Lantz, Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.