
**State Government & Tribal Relations
Committee**

HB 2757

Brief Description: Concerning official state designations.

Sponsors: Representatives Corry, Appleton, Rude, Frame, Dent, Riccelli, Davis and Lekanoff.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Replaces petrified wood with Ellensburg blue agate as the official state gem.
- Redesignates petrified wood as the official state vegetative fossil.
- Redesignates the Columbian mammoth as the official state vertebrate fossil.

Hearing Date: 2/5/20

Staff: Jason Zolle (786-7124).

Background:

A gem is a piece of mineral that has crystallized and been cut or polished, usually for the purpose of making jewelry. Crystals form when magma cools slowly into rock.

The Ellensburg blue agate is a gem found in central Washington that appears to exist nowhere else in the world. The gem is primarily found in areas north and northwest of Ellensburg. Tourists used to flock to Ellensburg to look for the blue gem, but by the 1940s most had been taken and finds became rare. Some sources call it the third rarest stone in the world. The bright blue color is caused by the manner in which the rock absorbs light.

Washington previously designated petrified wood as the state gem in 1975. Petrified wood is wood that has been fossilized. The fossilization process occurs when buried organic material (such as wood or bone) is replaced by minerals such as silica, calcite, pyrite, and opal, which seep into the organic material as it decays and hardens.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Washington also previously designated a state fossil in 1998: the Columbian mammoth. The Columbian mammoth went extinct about 11,000 years ago as part of a mass extinction of many large North American mammals, including the giant beaver, the Western camel, the short-faced bear, the saber-toothed cat, and the American lion. Some scientists believe that hunting was a primary cause of mammoth extinction, although climate change and habitat variations may have played a role as well.

Summary of Bill:

The bill replaces petrified wood with Ellensburg blue agate as the official state gem. Petrified wood is redesignated the official state vegetative fossil. The Columbian mammoth is redesignated the official state vertebrate fossil.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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