

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1020

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**As Passed House:**  
February 20, 2023

**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, Callan, Ryu, Simmons, Reed, Gregerson, Thai and Ormsby.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Relations: 1/10/23, 1/17/23 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 2/20/23, 88-5.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes the Sucasaurus rex as the state dinosaur.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Ramos, Chair; Stearns, Vice Chair; Abbarno, Ranking Minority Member; Christian, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Gregerson, Low and Mena.

**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

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

When an 80-million-year-old theropod 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. The fossil was classified as a piece of a theropod'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 theropod died; estimates range from Baja California, Mexico, to Northern California.

In any event, the theropod 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 theropod was likely a tyrannosaur, and they included images comparing the femur to that of a *Daspletosaurus*. As scientists lack enough of the theropod's bones to classify the species definitively, the theropod 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 theropod. Twelve states and Washington D.C. have official state dinosaurs.

**Summary of Bill:**

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

**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.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) The idea for this bill came from a fourth grade class that decided to propose new legislation as an opportunity to learn how government works and instill in its students the importance of being civically engaged and voting. It is not a silly bill, but rather it shows the greater significance of youth engagement and is formal recognition of the creativity and drive of students. A sixth grade leadership class has now become involved and is lobbying for its passage. Passing the bill will show students all over Washington that they matter and can effect change. There are many people who are passionate about dinosaurs, and recognizing a state dinosaur would help people appreciate the geologic history of the state.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Melanie Morgan, prime sponsor; Athena Tauscher; Amy Cole, Elmhurst Elementary; Owen Rowe, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission; Lyah Sandell; Kismet Bains; Sam Hoving; Brin Oman; Meeka Franks; and Dominick Johnston.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.