

Date of Hearing: March 25, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 581 (Bennett) – As Amended March 19, 2025

**SUBJECT:** State shrub

**SUMMARY:** Declares that the bigberry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) is the official state shrub of California and makes findings and declarations regarding the environmental and historical value of the bigberry manzanita.

**EXISTING LAW:**

1) Declares, among other official emblems, that:

- a) The golden poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) is the state flower (Government Code § 421);
- b) The California redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*, *Sequoia gigantea*) is the state tree (Government Code § 422);
- c) The California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) is the state amphibian (Government Code § 422.7);
- d) The California desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) is the state reptile (Government Code § 422.5);
- e) The California dog-face butterfly (*Zerene eurydice*) is the state insect (Government Code § 424.5); and
- f) The pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*) is the state bat (Government Code § 425.12).

2) Does not identify an official state shrub.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** None. This bill is keyed non-fiscal.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill declares that the bigberry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) is the official state shrub of California in order to promote appreciation and education of the bigberry manzanita in California. According to the author, this bill “will designate the bigberry manzanita as the official shrub of California. With invasive plant species contributing to the intensity and rapid spread of recent wildfires, it is critical for us to highlight the key benefits of native California plants. Due to millions of years of adaptation to the California climate and landscape, the bigberry manzanita possess unique abilities to efficiently utilize water, help with soil erosion and regenerate at higher rates after fire exposure. This species does not natively grow in any state outside of California, aside from a region in Baja California, making it uniquely representative of California.”

- 2) **Background.** California is renowned for its diverse landscapes, rich history, global influence, and its industrious and colorful people. The state represents its natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural identity with a unique array of official symbols. To celebrate this diversity, the state designates a number of state emblems that serve as reminders for residents and visitors alike of the state's distinct identity and the importance of preserving its heritage for future generations. As California continues to evolve and grow, its state emblems are intended to remain steadfast symbols of the state's past, present, and future.

Manzanita (genus *Arctostaphylos*) are native to the west coast of North America and comprise over 100 species and subspecies (collectively referred to as 'species' for simplicity in this analysis). Seven manzanita species are listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) [two of which are also listed under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA)] and the state has additionally listed six manzanita species under CESA. Bigberry manzanita, is not listed. The Morro manzanita, which is currently listed under the federal ESA, is currently before the Fish and Game Commission to be listed under CESA.



*Photos of the bigberry manzanita bush (left) and flowers (right).*

*Credit: California Conservation Genomics Project (left) and the Santa Monica Mountains Trail Council (right)*

According to the United States Forest Service, bigberry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) is a large, native, evergreen shrub found in chaparral, pinyon, and western hardwood ecosystems, which has put down roots from Mount Diablo to central Baja California. This species is highly valued for its ability to rehabilitate disturbed watersheds, as its extensive root system helps bind surface soil. Additionally, it is a hardy native ornamental plant; tolerant of heat, drought, and cold. These long-lived plants can survive for more than 100 years. Bigberry manzanita is an obligate postfire seeder that is best adapted to high-intensity, long-interval fires. These conditions allow the plant to grow significantly between fire events while ensuring that fires are intense enough to break through its hard seed coat to allow

germination. However, repeated short-interval fires can decimate bigberry manzanita populations, giving an advantage to sprouting species.

Bigberry manzanita is distinguished from other manzanitas by its large, sticky fruits, which ripen from late February to May. Its flowers attract pollinators, while birds, rodents, and coyotes consume its fruits. Despite their bitterness, manzanita berries appear to be edible for humans, and recipes for manzanita berry drinks can be found online. The leaves are also believed to have medicinal properties—they can be chewed to relieve nausea and used as a poultice to reduce discomfort from poison oak rashes. These leaves, however, are not as beneficial to other plant life. They contain toxic levels of arbutin and phenolic acid, which inhibit the germination and growth of annual plants within a six-foot radius of the shrub’s canopy through a biological process called allelopathy.

- 3) **Policy considerations.** California is now represented by 47 symbols, 43 of which are codified: state amphibian, animal, bat, bird, colors, crab, dance, dinosaur, fabric, flower, flag, folk dance, fossil, gemstone, gold rush ghost town, grass, historical society, insect, LGBTQ veterans memorial, lichen, marine fish, marine mammal, marine reptile, military museum, mineral, motto, mushroom, nickname, nuts, prehistoric artifact, reptile, rock, seal, shell, silver rush ghost town, slug, soil, song, sport, tall ship, tartan, tree, and Vietnam veterans memorial (Government Code §§ 420–429.9). So, do we need a shrubbery? See “Related legislation” for a collection of current and unsuccessful state symbol legislation. *The Committee may wish to consider, at what point does adding additional symbols make the designation meaningless?*

Symbols present heartwarming opportunity for reflection, recognition, and civic engagement. Designating a new state symbol may briefly stir a media response, but does not materially accomplish any policy goal such as supporting habitat, research, or protections for the identified symbol. With Proposition 140 (1990) capping the Legislature’s funding, is continuing to establish additional state symbols an appropriate use of the Legislatures limited resources? Other options are available to the Legislature, such as Resolutions, to establish state symbols. The Golden Trout (state fresh water fish), the California Coastal Trail (state trail), the California Consolidated Drum Band (state fife and drum band), and the Pasadena Playhouse (state theater) have all been established via resolutions. *The Committee may wish to consider whether legislation is the most appropriate mechanism to provide recognition to any potential symbol?*

- 4) **Arguments in support.** This bill’s sponsors write about the environmental and cultural history of the bigberry manzanita. Both sponsors indicate that the importance of educating the public on the value of chaparral habitat and the threat of fire and invasive species to the bigberry manzanita.
- 5) **Related legislation.** AB 666 (Rogers) of the current legislative session establishes Bigfoot as the official state cryptid. AB 666 has not yet been referred to a committee.

AB 1334 (Wallis) of the current legislative session establishes solar energy as the official state energy. AB 1334 was referred to the Assembly Utilities and Energy Committee.

SB 765 (Niello) of the current legislative session establishes the giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*) as the official state snake. SB 765 was referred to the Senate Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 1797 (Wood), Chapter 667, Statutes of 2024, establishes the Dungeness crab as the official state crustacean.

AB 1850 (Pellerin), Chapter 668, Statutes of 2024, establishes the banana slug (*Ariolimax*) as the official state slug of California.

AB 2504 (Dixon), Chapter 669, Statutes of 2024, establishes the shell of the black abalone as the official state seashell.

AB 3118 (Wallis) of 2024 would have established solar energy as the official state energy. AB 3118 died in the Assembly Committee on Utilities and Energy.

AB 868 (Garcia) of 2021 would have established the date shake as the official state milkshake. AB 868 died in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 1769 (Voepel) of 2018 would have established the California Vaquero Horse as the official state horse. AB 1769 died in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee.

SB 73 (Hueso) of 2017 would have established the “San Salvador” as the official state ship of exploration. SB 73 died in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 2470 (Nielsen) of 2012 would have established the sculpture in the Norther California Veterans Cemetery as the official state memorial for Vietnam veterans. AB 2470 died in the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee.

AB 2063 (Huffman) of 2010 would have established the Chinook salmon as the official state anadromous fish. AB 2063 was vetoed by the governor.

SB 624 (Romero) of 2009 would have removed serpentine as the official state rock and lithological emblem. SB 624 died in the Assembly Rules Committee.

SB 1253 (Migden) of 2006 would have established zinfandel as the historic wine of California. SB 1253 was vetoed by the governor.

AB 2636 (House) of 2000 would have established the almond as the official state nut. AB 2636 died in the Assembly Governmental Organization Committee.

AB 3007 (Sher) of 1988 would have designated the banana slug the official state mollusk. AB 3007 was vetoed by the governor.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

California Chaparral Institute (Co-Sponsor)  
Los Padres Forestwatch (Co-Sponsor)  
California Institute for Biodiversity

**Opposition**

None on file

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