

Date of Hearing: July 1, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

SB 765 (Niello) – As Amended June 23, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 39-0

SUBJECT: State snake

SUMMARY: Declares that the giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*) is the official state snake of California and makes findings and declarations regarding the threats to the snake's population.

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 snake.

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

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** According to the author, “By naming the Giant Garter Snake as the State Snake of California acknowledges the importance of the species in the ecology, agriculture, and water resources of California.”
- 2) **Background.** Giant garter snakes (*Thamnophis gigas*) are semi-aquatic snakes endemic to marshes, sloughs and other stagnant or slow-moving aquatic habitats of California's Central Valley. Although they once ranged through all but the most northern portions of the Central Valley, the loss of wetlands has extirpated them from about two-thirds of their historical range. Currently, giant garter snakes range from Butte County to Fresno County.

Giant garter snakes are identified by their dark bodies, yellow dorsal stripe, and pale-yellow lateral stripes. Female giant garter snakes reach a larger size than males, with the largest measured snake being over five feet long. Historically, giant garter snakes preyed on fish and amphibians, some of which are locally extinct. Now, giant garter snakes have radically changed their diet and target more general fish and even invasive species like the American bullfrog.



Adult, Yolo County © [Gary Nafis](#). Specimen courtesy of Glen Wylie, USGS

Giant garter snakes were once found throughout the rivers and floodplains of the Central Valley. However, due to agricultural conversion and urban development, these historic floodplains have been dramatically altered by levees, canals, and fields. This has ultimately led to a loss of over 90% of the historic wetlands in the Central Valley. Although some agricultural habitats, like rice, support giant garter snake populations, rice fields are a poor facsimile for the original wetlands because of the lack of complexity and ability to reproduce the natural phenomena that the snakes are best adapted to. Despite this difficulty, the lack of suitable, natural habitat means that these snakes are dependent on rice agriculture.

Because of this loss of habitat, giant garter snakes were among the inaugural list of species listed under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) in 1970. The species was subsequently listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1993. The reason for these listings has primarily been habitat loss caused by development and conversion from wetlands to agriculture. Research indicates that listing under both CESA and ESA has benefited giant garter snake conservation, although in order to fully recover the species, substantial investments will need to be made in habitat restoration, ensuring reliable water supplies, and further research into better management practices.

- 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). Should the giant garter snake slither onto this list? It is worth noting that California already has both a state reptile and marine reptile, so arguably, this slot has been filled. By further dividing classifications, it might not be long until a state lizard is proposed. 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 a 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 130 (1990) capping the Legislature’s funding, is continuing to establish additional state symbols an appropriate use of the Legislature’s limited resources? Other options are available to the Legislature, such as Resolutions, to establish state symbols. The Golden Trout (state freshwater 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.** Several organizations write in support of this bill noting the resilience and adaptability of the snake to survive despite a significant loss of habitat. These groups hope that elevating the giant garter snake as a state symbol will call attention to the threatened snake.
- 5) **Related legislation.** AB 581 (Bennet) of the current legislative session establishes the bigberry manzanita as the official state shrub. AB 581 is pending on the Senate Floor.

AB 666 (Rogers) of the current legislative session establishes Bigfoot as the official state cryptid. AB 666 was held in Assembly Arts, Entertainment, Sports, and Tourism Committee.

AB 1334 (Wallis) of the current legislative session establishes solar energy as the official state energy. AB 1334 is pending on 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.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

California Rice Commission (co-sponsor)
Save the Snakes (co-sponsor)
Defenders of Wildlife
Grassland Water District

Opposition

None on file

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