

Date of Hearing: March 19, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

AB 1850 (Pellerin) – As Introduced January 17, 2024

SUBJECT: State slug

SUMMARY: Declares that the banana slug (*Ariolimax*) is the official state slug of California and makes findings and declarations regarding the environmental and social value of the banana slug.

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 gigantean*) 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 slug.

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

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** This bill declares that the banana slug (*Ariolimax*) is the official state slug of California in order to promote appreciation, education, and research of banana slugs in California. According to the author, “The banana slug (*Ariolimax*) is an iconic symbol of California’s famed temperate rainforest and an example of the rapid evolution that has made California extremely biologically diverse. Due to its quirky appearance and name, the banana slug is highly popular among both children and adults in California, and even serves as the beloved mascot of the University of California, Santa Cruz. Despite the cultural fascination with the banana slug, there is a dearth of academic research into this mollusk which can shed light on the evolutionary history of the state. [This bill] designates the banana slug as the official state slug of California in order to promote appreciation, education, and research of banana slugs in the state.”

- 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.

California is home to over 200 species of snail and slug.¹ In California, slugs and humans have had a long history. The Yurok people used the native banana slug as a food source in times of shortage. During the 1800s and early 1900s, German immigrants also used this native species for food. Slugs, however, have long been regarded worldwide as severe pests of agricultural and horticultural production.²

There are a total of 17 native slug species over six genera in California. The best researched and most well-known is the banana slug *Ariolimax*. Other native genera include:

- *Hesperarion*, which is similar, but smaller than, *Ariolimax*;
- *Anadenulus cockerelli*, the only species of its genus, which has been found Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego Counties; and
- *Prophysaon*, which is known for its ability to self-amputate a portion of its tail.

Banana slug “fast” facts. Named for its resemblance to the yellow fruit, banana slugs are characterized by their yellowish tint with some sporting brown spots. If a banana slug needs to split, it can do so at a blistering speed of 6.5 inches/min. There are six described species of banana slug: *A. buttoni*, *A. californicus californicus*, *A. californicus brachyphallus*, *A. columbianus*, *A. dolichophallus*, *A. stamineus*, and a new species discovered at Mt. Palomar in San Diego County that is still being described. Banana slugs range from Central California to Alaska. The Pacific banana slug (*A. columbianus*) can grow up to 10 inches long, making it the largest land mollusk in North America and the second-largest species of terrestrial slug in the world. The Pacific banana slug is the only species that is also found outside of California.

Banana slugs, like all slugs, sense their environment using four, regenerative tentacles: two on the top of their heads to function as eyes and two lower tentacles to feel and smell. Banana slugs secrete a layer of mucus to prevent their skin from drying out and help them glide along in the forest. This slime is also a defense mechanism against predators that might find a banana slug ripe for the taking, because when ingested, the slime can make the hopeful hunters tongue go numb. Some animals such as the Pacific Giant Salamanders and Northwestern Garter Snakes, find banana slugs quite appealing and are unbothered by the mucous or its numbing affect.

¹ Checklist of the Land Snails and Slugs of California, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History (2003).

² Slugs: A Guide to the Invasive and Native Fauna of California, University of California, Division of Natural Resources (2009).

Banana slugs are detritivores (decomposers) and support forest health by converting plant and animal matter to rich soil matter. Through this process they are also responsible for some amount of seed dispersal.

- 3) **Policy considerations.** California is now represented by 44 symbols, 40 of which are codified: state amphibian, animal, bat, bird, colors, 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, silver rush ghost town, soil, song, sport, tall ship, tartan, tree, and Vietnam veterans memorial. (Government Code § 420–429.9). 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. A 2002 LAO report estimates that each bill costs at least \$18,000, which is over \$30,000 today. So is it worth the cost? 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?*

Furthermore, this bill establishes an entire genus of slug (*Ariolimax*) as the state symbol. Other plant and animal state symbols have been specified to an individual species. This bill is effectively adopting every species of banana slug as the state symbol. This is not without precedence as California also has four state nuts (*i.e.*, almond, pecan, pistachio, and walnut).

- 4) **Related legislation.** 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.

AB 1797 (Wood) of the current legislative session establishes the Dungeness crab as the official state crustacean. AB 1797 is pending before this Committee.

AB 2504 (Dixon) of the current legislative session establishes the black abalone as the official state seashell. AB 2504 is pending before this Committee.

AB 3118 (Wallis) of the current legislative session establishes solar energy as the official state energy. AB 3118 is pending before the Assembly Committee on Utilities and Energy.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file

Opposition

None on file

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