



North Carolina Herpetological Society

N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences
11 West Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601

Representative Timothy Spear
NC House of Representatives
300 N. Salisbury Street, Room 402
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Dear Representative Spear:

The Executive Council of the North Carolina Herpetological Society would like to take this opportunity to comment on HB 958 ("Adopt Bullfrog as State Amphibian"). While we greatly applaud the idea of adopting a state amphibian and feel it is an action long overdue, we must respectfully disagree with the choice of Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*) as the official State Amphibian.

North Carolina has the chance to be creative and original in this decision and pick a species that truly reflects our state's unparalleled amphibian diversity and natural history. North Carolina leads the nation in amphibian diversity, rivaled only by Georgia. The Southern Appalachians, including our Mountain region, has the highest salamander diversity of anywhere in the world. We also have at least one frog species only found in the Carolinas and Georgia.

We feel there are better choices than Bullfrog for our State Amphibian. At least three states already have this species as their official amphibian: Missouri, Iowa, and Oklahoma. Moreover, the Bullfrog has been introduced to western states and is there considered an invasive pest, threatening native species (<http://www.werc.usgs.gov/hq/invasive/toad-frog.html>).

This proposed bill gives our state the exciting opportunity to choose a species that is truly original and unique to North Carolina. Why not pick a species that has been identified as high-priority by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's *North Carolina Wildlife Action Plan* (2005)? Further, please think of the conservation-related, educational and outreach opportunities surrounding this decision.

Some suggested choices for state amphibian include:

1. Neuse River Waterdog (*Necturus lewisi*), which is a fairly large, fairly well-known salamander that was first described by C. S. Brimley, a pioneer in our state's natural history and one of the founders of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences in Raleigh. This species is only found in North Carolina, and its common name reflects one of the state's best known watersheds.
2. Yonahlossee Salamander (*Plethodon yonahlossee*), which is a large woodland salamander with striking, brick-red color on its back, first discovered in our state and named for Old Yonahlossee Road in Linville, NC. Most of this species' range is in North Carolina. It is in the family *Plethodontidae*; which, on an amphibian basis, is the Southern Appalachian's claim to fame.
3. Eastern Hellbender (*Cryptobranchus a. alleganiensis*), which is North America's largest salamander species and encountered often by anglers in the Mountain region. Hellbenders are indicators of water quality (cannot persist in polluted or sediment-filled streams), and North Carolina has among the world's healthiest remaining populations of hellbenders.
4. Marbled Salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*), which is a charismatic, chunky-bodied salamander with unique "marbled" patterns on its back. This species occurs over a large portion of the state.
5. Carolina Gopher Frog (*Rana c. capito*), which is a species that is unique to the Sandhills and Coastal Plain and one that long-time residents may have heard calling on warm, rainy nights when

they were children. This animal is a classic example of those species suffering from the destruction of our once vast longleaf pine forests for which the state was once known.

A few other species we feel would be a better choice for State Amphibian include: Brimley's Chorus Frog (*Pseudacris brimleyi*), Pine Barrens Treefrog (*Hyla andersonii*), Green Salamander (*Aneides aeneus*), Eastern Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma t. tigrinum*), or Mabee's Salamander (*Ambystoma mabeei*).

Regarding the official language of the proposed bill, we would like to suggest some changes that better demonstrate our state's rich amphibian natural history:

Whereas, amphibians are part of North Carolina's natural systems from mountains to sea;

Whereas, North Carolina leads the nation in salamander diversity;

Whereas, 12 families and approximately 90 species of amphibians call North Carolina home;

Whereas, the Southern Appalachians are the center of diversity for plethodontid salamanders;

Whereas, frog calls herald the coming of spring and are much enjoyed by the state's citizenry;

Whereas, amphibians play important roles in the natural systems of the state and serve as indicators of environmental health; and

Whereas, the State of North Carolina does not have an official State Amphibian; Now, therefore,

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:.....”

In summary, there are many, many species other than the Bullfrog that more adequately reflect the rich amphibian diversity of North Carolina. We ask that you reconsider the choice of Bullfrog as our representative amphibian.

Sincerely,

President, North Carolina Herpetological Society