

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2757

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
State Government & Tribal Relations

**Title:** An act relating to official state designations.

**Brief Description:** Concerning official state designations.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Corry, Appleton, Rude, Frame, Dent, Riccelli, Davis and Lekanoff.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

State Government & Tribal Relations: 2/5/20, 2/7/20 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Replaces petrified wood with Ellensburg blue agate as the official state gem.
- Redesignates petrified wood as the official state vegetative fossil.
- Redesignates the Columbian mammoth as the official state vertebrate fossil.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL RELATIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Gregerson, Chair; Pellicciotti, Vice Chair; Walsh, Ranking Minority Member; Goehner, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Dolan, Hudgins, Mosbrucker and Smith.

**Staff:** Jason Zolle (786-7124).

**Background:**

A gem is a piece of mineral that has crystallized and been cut or polished, usually for the purpose of making jewelry. Crystals form when magma cools slowly into rock.

The Ellensburg blue agate is a gem found in central Washington that appears to exist nowhere else in the world. The gem is primarily found in areas north and northwest of Ellensburg. Tourists used to flock to Ellensburg to look for the blue gem, but by the 1940s

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most had been taken and finds became rare. Some sources call it the third rarest stone in the world. The bright blue color is caused by the manner in which the rock absorbs light.

Washington previously designated petrified wood as the state gem in 1975. Petrified wood is wood that has been fossilized. The fossilization process occurs when buried organic material (such as wood or bone) is replaced by minerals such as silica, calcite, pyrite, and opal, which seep into the organic material as it decays and hardens.

Washington also previously designated the Columbian mammoth as the state fossil in 1998. The Columbian mammoth went extinct about 11,000 years ago as part of a mass extinction of many large North American mammals, including the giant beaver, the Western camel, the short-faced bear, the saber-toothed cat, and the American lion. Some scientists believe that hunting was a primary cause of mammoth extinction, although climate change and habitat variations may have played a role as well.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The bill replaces petrified wood with Ellensburg blue agate as the official state gem. Petrified wood is redesignated the official state vegetative fossil. The Columbian mammoth is redesignated the official state vertebrate fossil.

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**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) Petrified wood is a fossil and not a gem. People in Central Washington want to recognize Ellensburg blue agate as a gem that is unique and found only in this state. People all over the country often ask about blue agate jewelry they see worn. There are over 50 samples of Ellensburg blue agate at the museum in Kittitas County. It was first discovered in March 1905. It is an important gem to the state's history and heritage. This bill also creates the state vegetative fossil distinction to recognize petrified wood.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Corry, prime sponsor; Maureen Morrow; and Sadie Thayer, Kittitas County Historical Museum.

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