



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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PAINTED TURTLE: STATE REPTILE

**House Bill 4948 as introduced
First Analysis (9-28-95)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Carl Gnodtke
Committee: Regulatory Affairs**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

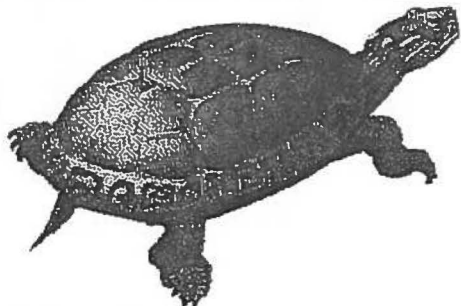
Since Michigan became a state in 1837, it has adopted various objects, animals, and plants to serve as official state symbols. Michigan has a state flower (the apple blossom), a state bird (the robin), a state tree (the white pine), a state stone (the Petoskey Stone), a state gem (chlorastrolite, or the "Isle Royale Greenstone"), a state fish (the brook trout), and even a state soil (the Kalkaska soil series). However, Michigan has not as yet adopted a state reptile. At constituent request, legislation to adopt an official state reptile has been introduced.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would establish the painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) as the official state reptile.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The painted turtle, reported to be the most numerous of small-pond turtles, is found primarily throughout Michigan, the northern United States, and Southern Canada, but its range extends down to Florida, Louisiana, and Arizona. Painted turtles range in length from four to ten inches and have distinctive red and yellow markings on their heads, limbs, and shells. They typically live in shallow waters and feed on crayfish, insects, and mollusks, including zebra mussels. In winter, painted turtles hibernate under water where they bury themselves in the mud.



Chrysemys Picta

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill has no fiscal implications. (9-27-95)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The painted turtle is ideally suited to assume the role of state reptile. Found throughout Michigan, residents from Isle Royale to Niles can easily find and enjoy them. The turtles serve a functional purpose by eating pond vegetation; insects, such as mosquitoes; and mollusks, including the troublesome zebra mussel. Found in the wild and sold at some pet stores, painted turtles are reported to make great pets. As proponents of the turtles point out, painted turtles are easy to handle, fun to play with, and easier to hold than snakes or other state mascots.

For:

By designating an official state reptile, acknowledgement would be given to the important role that reptiles play, especially in the wild. Reptiles help keep Michigan's insect, mollusk, and rodent population in check, while themselves providing food for larger animals of prey. In particular, the painted turtle is a fitting representative of the reptile family to receive this moniker by being both useful and non-threatening to humans, projecting an image of peace and contentment.

Against:

According to a recent Associated Press article, pet reptiles, such as iguanas and other lizards, can infect their owners with salmonella. In 1975, the Food and Drug Administration banned the sale of small turtles when it was found that 14 percent of the salmonella cases in the early 1970s came from small pet turtles. Salmonella is usually transmitted to humans when they eat contaminated foods, but people can also become ill after handling infected reptiles. According to the Center for Disease

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Control, pregnant women, small children, and people with compromised immune systems are at most risk of being infected with salmonella, and should avoid contact with reptiles. It is reported that as many as 90 percent of reptiles may carry salmonella bacteria. By designating an official state reptile, and the painted turtle in particular, people might be encouraged to seek out reptiles as pets, thus increasing the possibility of salmonella infection.

Response:

People can also get infected with salmonella by handling raw chicken or eating undercooked eggs, but there is no ban on grilling chicken. As with most things, people need to be made aware of possible risks or dangers so that they can take proper precautions. In fact, since the majority of pet reptiles are imported from other countries, perhaps the problem lies more with regulations governing the importation of animals, and not necessarily with reptiles as pets.

POSITIONS:

There are no positions on the bill.