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State symbols part of history

The Idaho Legislature, beset by education and philosophical strife in the past session, did settle the trying task of designating a state symbol.

It must be with a sigh of relief for many Idahoans to know the lawmakers in all their wisdom reached a virtual unanimous agreement for such a weighty matter. It designated the "Hagerman Horse" as the official state fossil. Fossil, it must be noted, is an uncomplimentary term to which some of the more conservative legislators are referred to by some citizens.

The bill gave special status to the 13.5-million-old-fossil on display at the Hagerman Valley Historical Society Museum. It passed the Senate 34-5.

Even the state's U.S. congressional delegation is trying to have the fossil beds designated as a National Monument. Just two weeks ago, Sen. Steve Symms, R-Idaho, predicted passage of legislation declaring the Hagerman Fossil Beds a National Monument.

The fossil measure was the only one of three bills introduced the past session by the Idaho Legislature for special designation that did pass.

The Senate earlier turned down bills to designate the Silver Sage as

the state bush and the white sturgeon as the state fish. A Kuna school girl was sent home crying because the bush bill measure failed. So shame on them.

The fish measure was sponsored by Sen. Herb Carlson, R-Eagle. Critics contended it was a trash fish. It was drowned by a 31-6 vote. This fishy issue split party lines. Even Sen. John Hansen, R-Idaho Falls, who should have been a trout backer, voted for the measure. Two other Idaho Falls Republican state senators, Mike Crapo and Ann Rydalch, discreetly managed to be absent at vote-taking time, thus avoiding clouding their political future on such a portentous issue.

The Silver Sage bush designation also was uprooted because opponents maintained that the species of sage was common in only a few areas of the state. After all, north Idaho and east Idaho legislators have their own pet bush, even including the hardy sagebrush.

Perhaps in the next session, some fireworks could be provided to designate the Idaho Sand Dune Beetle as the state bug. What is Idaho without an official state bug?

This bug, we understand, is an

endangered species and is found in the sand dunes west of St. Anthony. Legislative backing might give it impetus to save it from extinction. We suspect the conservative east Idaho delegation would consider it with less than enthusiastic support. So much for that.

Most Idahoans, sad to relate, don't know the various state symbols.

The Great Seal of Idaho is the only state seal in the union designed by a woman, Erma Edwards Green. It was adopted in 1891 by the State Legislature, a year after statehood. It carries the Latin motto, "Esto Perpetua," translated to "It is perpetuated" or "It is forever."

The State Flag is silk with a blue shield, five feet six inches by four feet four inches. It is bordered by a gilt fringe, with the State Seal of Idaho in the center. It was adopted by the 1907 Legislature.

Then there is the Western White Pine as the state tree, adopted in 1935, Mountain Bluebird as the state bird adopted in 1931, Appaloosa as the state horse adopted in 1975, Idaho Star Garnet as the state gemstone adopted in 1967, and Syringa as the state flower adopted also in 1931.

On Jan. 1, 1987, the Idaho commemorative license plate with an attractive burgundy blue background was adopted. It is designed to help celebrate the state's 100th birthday in 1990. Revenue from the plates will help support centennial projects throughout the state. Its sale so far has exceeded the fondest expectations.

But there is one designation most Idahoans know or should know. That's the state song, "Here We Have Idaho," adopted by the 21st Legislature in 1931.

The Idaho Blue Book, the official state periodical, also explains that "Idaho" is a coined or invented word. It is not, as many believe, a derivation of an Indian phrase, "E Dah Hoe (How), supposedly meaning "Gem of the Mountains." The name was originally suggested for Colorado. It was used for a steamship which traveled the Columbia River in 1860. Those gold diggings began to be called the "Idaho mines."

In the Idaho Centennial Year to be observed next year, this is history that all true proud Idahoans should remember.

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