

Nomination of T.rex (*Tyrannosaurus rex*) for National Fossil Reptile and Nomination of the American Mastodon (*Mammut americanum*) for National Fossil Mammal

America has a national fossil day but no national fossil. It is time to fill that void. Fossils are a part of America's heritage and a great introduction to science, beginning in kindergarten.

The selection of the bison as America's national mammal in 2014 opens the door for selecting two national fossils, a reptile and a mammal. There are two fossils with a pure North American pedigree that stand out above all others: the dinosaur *Tyrannosaurus rex*, known as T.rex, and the American mastodon, *Mammut americanum*.

For many Americans, the first fossil that comes to mind is T.rex, which roamed western North America between about 68 and 66 million years ago. No other fossil comes close to matching the appeal of T.rex to young and old alike, the world over. It fits the mold of other national symbols and is the perfect candidate for national fossil reptile.

For national fossil mammal, the mastodon would be an excellent choice. It roamed throughout North America from about 2.4 million years ago to about 10,500 years ago when it became extinct. Mastodon fossils are found, or could be found, in every state except Hawaii. Mounted mastodons are featured attractions in museums in at least fifteen states and the District of Columbia.

A lingering question is, "Why select the mastodon over the more popular look-alike, the mammoth?" Elimination of the mammoth for consideration as national mammal fossil is based on two issues. First, there are two species of mammoths in America, a potential source for confusion, and the more popular woolly mammoth is best known from fossils in Siberia. Second, the mammoth

is an elephant, the symbol of a national political party. Politics must be kept out of the selection of a national fossil.

In the fall of 2021, Randy Frye, a member of Indiana's House of Representatives, visited the Hanover College Science Center, where casts of Tinker, a juvenile T.rex, and Sandy, the Burning Tree mastodon, are on display. That visit prompted him to introduce House Bill 1013, naming the American mastodon, *Mammut americanum*, as Indiana's state fossil.

For the Indiana legislature, the approval of a state fossil rested largely on its educational value. House Bill 1013 was approved 92–0 by the House and 39–6 by the Senate. The bill becomes effective 1 July.

The same approach should be applicable at the national level, where new educational opportunities would be welcomed and valued. Paired together, the T.rex and the mastodon offer a wide range of topics in science education at all grade levels. They certainly fit the mold of other American symbols in representing the best of what makes America great.

What's next? If you agree with my proposal, contact your elected representatives to Congress. I plan to do the same. Working together, we can make it happen. You may contact me at totten@hanover.edu. I would appreciate hearing from you.

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