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In Support of HB 599

It is said that the charm of fishing is that it is the pursuit of what is elusive but attainable- a perpetual series of occasions for hope. It seems to me that designating a state fish for Ohio is in the same boat- elusive but attainable. We have failed too many times in the past to designate a State Fish for our great state. Ohio is in the company of landlocked Iowa and a state that has under 50 miles of Great Lake coastline, Indiana, as the only States in our Union without a designated State Fish. The time is now for the residents of Ohio and our State Legislature to step up and demand that we do not become the only state left officially fishless.

Here in Ohio we are home to the envy of not just the country- but of the world- 10,000 square miles of Lake Erie's fresh water with 312 miles of its coastline. In addition to that, we have over 90,000 miles of rivers and streams. On any given weekend you will be able to find scores of anglers casting out their lines in hopes of bringing in the big one. From the shores of Lake Erie, to the Mighty Cuyahoga, to the Apple Creek, Cowan Lake, The Great Miami River, Lake Lakengren, The Auglaize River, Englewood reservoir, Grand Lake Saint Mary's, The Big Walnut Creek, The Tuscarawas River, Lake Cable, all the way to the Ohio River- you will find them there. People gathering together with family and fishing buddies to all share in their love for fishing. Let us give these sportsmen what they deserve- an official state fish.

Now when I share this story of the need for a State Fish to my friends and colleagues- there is first outrage that we do not have one already. Then there is a resounding show of support for this bill. However for a few, there is a follow up question- "Why the Walleye?". To that I say- The walleye is the MOST deserving fish to be recognized as OUR State Fish. The walleye is already the unofficial state fish of Ohio, a total of 95 million walleye are in lake Erie alone, and Walleye tournaments in Ohio rival that of any other state, bringing in individuals from all over the county to our Great State. There is even a walleye tournament Championship being put on by The Ohio Walleye Federation happening THIS weekend at Berlin Lake.

ON a personal note, I recall a few events that center around the walleye in my life. As a child I would go fishing with my Pappy, who was the best fisherman I ever knew. He loved Walleye fishing and when I'd hook a big one that was too large for my 7 year old self to reel in; Pappy would be right there to help out. Afterwards, we'd bring our catches home to have a large family fish fry courtesy of Grandma toots. These are some of my fondest memories as a child. Later in life I would accompany many of my friends on fishing adventures. I am the first to admit I am not the best fisherman out there. But, the joy of one in our group getting the big Walleye and just being able to be out in the great outdoors with my buddies are memories I will hold on to forever. Finally, there is the story of when I spent a few months living in Alaska, a place where fishermen come from all over to enjoy the great outdoors and go fishing. I remember talking to a fella who lived up there- we spoke about how gorgeous the streams were and the different types of Alaskan salmon that people go out to catch. However, as soon as he found out I was from Ohio- his eyes lit up and he pivoted the conversation from his Great State to ours. He immediately spoke about coming over here in the mid 2000 to visit family and all go Walleye fishing together. This is the attraction that the State of Ohio and our Walleye have on the rest of the country. It is high time to come together and pass what is long overdue. To finally be the ones to designate the Walleye as the OFFICIAL State Fish to the Great State of Ohio.

Thank you