
SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Senator Susan Rubio

Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No:	SB 1178	Hearing Date:	4/14/2026
Author:	Reyes		
Version:	4/7/2026 Amended		
Urgency:	No	Fiscal:	No
Consultant:	Brian Duke		

SUBJECT: State wasp

DIGEST: This bill establishes the California yellow jacket (*Vespula sulphurea*) as the official state wasp.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law establishes the following, among other things, as official state emblems:

- a) “Eureka” as the official State Motto.
- b) “The Golden State” as the official State Nickname.
- c) The golden poppy as the official State Flower, and April 6th of each year as California Poppy Day.
- d) The California desert tortoise as the official state reptile, and the Pacific leatherback sea turtle as the official state marine reptile.
- e) The California red-legged frog as the official state amphibian.
- f) The California dog-face butterfly as the official State insect.
- g) The pallid bat as the official state bat.
- h) The banana slug as the official state slug.
- i) The Dungeness crab as the official state crustacean.

This bill establishes the California yellow jacket (*Vespula sulphurea*) as the official state wasp and includes related Legislative findings and declarations.

Background

Author Statement. According to the author’s office, “SB 1178 designates the California Yellowjacket as the official state *Vespula* (wasp). The *Vespula sulphurea* (California Yellowjacket) is endemic to California and has been featured as a mascot for schools across the region, such as Berkeley High School, Franklin

High School in Stockton, and Colton High School. This rare species of social wasp is found in California's Upper Sonora fauna highlighting the unique qualities of our state's diverse ecology and reinforces the state's commitment to environmental protection. As a predator to caterpillars and flies that damage crops, this fascinating insect has been a beneficial agricultural tool as a natural pest control. To highlight the Inland Empire, and our contributions to the state, the yellowjacket will represent California's fierce, loyal and protective nature."

What's All the Buzz About? A wasp is any insect of the narrow-waisted suborder Apocrita of the order Hymenoptera which is neither a bee nor an ant. Wasps do not constitute a clade, a complete natural group with a single ancestor as bees and ants are deeply nested within the wasps, having evolved from wasp ancestors. Wasps that are members of the clade Aculeata can sting their prey.

The California yellowjacket is a species of wasp within the family Vespidae. It is found distributed in the Upper Sonoran Fauna of California, but has been known to occur in southern Oregon, western Nevada, southern Arizona, and northern Baja California. Nests of the species are found underground, with a maximum known worker count of 1,1000. It is preyed upon by the California scrub jay and spiders. It feeds on pollinates on plants such as fennel, California figwort, and the chaparral broom.



Source Peter J. Bryant, Camp Metoche, San Bernardino County, CA 6/10/2012

According to the [Mosquito and Vector Management District of Santa Barbara County](#), in the summer months foraging Yellowjackets may become a nuisance in parks, campgrounds, and other recreational areas. When a nest is disturbed, Yellowjackets can inflict multiple stings that are painful and may be life threatening to individuals who are hypersensitive to the venom. Additionally, they may cause structural damage to a home when they construct nests in walls or attics. Common California Yellowjackets include the western yellowjacket, common yellowjacket, German yellowjacket, prairie yellowjacket, and aerial yellowjacket.

According to the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), during 2011-2021, a total of 788 deaths from hornet, wasp, and bee stings occurred (an average of 72 deaths per year) in the United States. The number of deaths per year ranged from 59 (2012) to 89 (2017) and overall, 84% of deaths occurred among males.

California's Official State Emblems. California is renowned for its diverse landscapes, rich history, global influence, and its industrious and vibrant people. Boasting a unique array of official symbols, the state represents its natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural identity through emblems. These symbols serve as reminders for residents and visitors alike, emphasizing the state's distinct identity and the importance of preserving its heritage for future generations. As California continues to evolve and grow, its state emblems are intended to remain steadfast symbols of the state's past, present, and future.

For example, the golden poppy is codified as the official state flower, representing the state's vibrant landscapes and wildflower fields. Many people believe that emblem law prohibits cutting or damaging the California poppy because of its official designation. In fact, there is no law specifically protecting the California poppy, but the designation endears a special appreciation of the flower and has perpetuated the myth that no one may pick them. Designated in 1903, the golden poppy symbolizes the beauty of California's natural environment.

Several of the state's official emblems lean heavily on California's Gold Rush history. The official state motto – "Eureka" – is a Greek word that translates to "I have found it." In the context of California, the motto is closely tied to the California Gold Rush of 1848-1855. Gold discovered at Sutter's Mill in 1848 sparked a massive influx of fortune-seekers who flocked to California to seek wealth and prosperity. Native gold is designated as the official state mineral and mineralogic emblem, while "The Golden State" serves as the official state nickname, and Bodie is established as the official state gold rush ghost town.

California is now represented by a swarm of nearly 50 state symbols, 45 of which are codified by statute in Government Code, including: state amphibian, animal,

bat, bird, colors, crustacean, dance, dinosaur, fabric, flower, flag, folk dance, fossil, gemstone, gold rush ghost town, grass, historical society, insect, LGBTQ veterans memorial, lichen, marine fish, marine mammal, marine reptile, military museum, mineral, motto, mushroom, nickname, nuts, prehistoric artifact, reptile, rock, sea shell, seal, silver rush ghost town, slug, soil, song, sport, tall ship, tartan, tree, and Vietnam veterans memorial.

Almost Official. Not every bill proposing a novel state emblem gets to fly right on to officialdom. Examples include AB 666 (Rogers, 2025) which would have named Bigfoot as the state cryptid, AB 868 (E. Garcia, 2021) proposed to establish the date shake as the official state milkshake, and AB 1769 (Voepel, 2018) would have established the California Vaquero Horse as the official state horse. Those bills were either never heard in committee or failed passage.

In 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger terminated the possibility of recognizing Zinfandel as “California’s historic wine” contemplated by AB 1253 (Migden, 2006). As introduced, the bill sought to designate that varietal as an official state emblem. However, the bill was watered down after much attention and negotiation and instead proposed Zinfandel as historic. Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed the legislation writing, in part, “California wines have inspired authors, artists and Oscar-winning motion pictures. Singling one out for special recognition would be inappropriate.” That bill is yet to be back.

Simply Symbolic? Designating a new state symbol can briefly buzz up attention in the media (whether positive or negative) but does not always materially accomplish any policy goal such as supporting habitat, research, or protection for the identified symbol. Each new symbol may lead to a sort of “emblem fatigue” as successive designations produce progressively smaller spikes in public interest, fostering a growing frustration from the public.

Further, a February 1, 2024, stinging article in CalMatters titled “[A bill for every problem? Why California lawmakers introduce longshots,](#)” cites a 2002 Legislative Analyst’s Office estimate that “each bill cost at least \$18,000 to go from introduction to passage: Each bill is given a title and number, goes through analysis by committee staff and is printed out. An updated dollar figure from the legislative analyst was not available, but adjusting for inflation, each bill costs in the neighborhood of \$30,000.”

The article goes on to note that, “[e]ven Jerry Brown, who famously vetoed a bill with the message, ‘Not every human problem deserves a law,’ signed a majority of those sent to his desk while he was governor.”

California's Proposition, 140 approved by the voters in 1990 – among other things – limited the total amount of expenditures allowed by the Legislature. The Legislature may wish to consider at what point establishing additional state symbols reaches a breaking point in a larger cost-benefit analysis. Alternative avenues currently exist that allow for the Legislature to recognize the myriad iconic animals, places, and things that make California a globally recognized cultural driver it is – without the need for creating new statute. Options may include resolutions which are commonly adopted and allow the Legislature to highlight particularly notable animals, plants, places, or items within the state.

Policy Consideration. This Committee is now the only policy committee of the Legislature with primary jurisdiction over official state emblems. The Committee may wish to consider whether designating a new state emblem in statute is the most appropriate approach, particularly given the recent influx of legislation proposing additional official symbols. In the three legislative sessions since 2021-2022, 15 bills have been introduced attempting to designate a novel official state emblem. The three legislative sessions immediately prior saw eight such bills introduced and from 2000-2015 the Legislature approved, and the Governor signed, eight new state emblems. California already maintains nearly 50 state emblems, including multiple categories within similar subject areas (e.g., state animal, marine mammal, bird, and others) and notably already has a state insect.

As such, the Committee may wish to explore an alternative more holistic, statewide perspective approach by removing the contents of the bill and instead directing the California State Library to conduct a one-year study on the state wasp and report back to the Legislature with recommendations. This approach would allow for a more holistic, statewide perspective and provide the Legislature with informed recommendations as follows:

Amendment #1: Strike Sections 1 and 2

Amendment #2: Insert Section 1

(a) The California State Library shall conduct a study and collect public comments on the best candidate for the official state wasp.

(b) On or before January 1, 2028, the California State Library shall submit a report to the Legislature with the Library's recommendations based on the study conducted pursuant to subdivision (a).

(c) (1) A report to be submitted pursuant to subdivision (b) shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795.

(2) Pursuant to Section 10231.5, this section is repealed on January 1, 2029.

Prior/Related Legislation

SB 1214 (Ochoa Bogh, 2026) establishes the western monarch as the official State Butterfly. (Pending in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee)

SB 1286 (Richardson, 2026) establishes the California sea lion (*Zalophus californianus*) as the official state pinniped. (Pending in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee)

AB 1666 (Rogers, 2026) would have state the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation designation Bigfoot as the official state cryptid. (Gutted and amended into an unrelated topic)

SB 765 (Niello, Chapter 482, Statutes of 2025) established the giant garter snake (*Thamnophis gigas*) as the official state snake.

AB 581 (Bennett, Chapter 481, Statutes of 2026) established the bigberry manzanita (*Arctostaphylos glauca*) as the official state shrub.

AB 666 (Rogers, 2025) would have established Bigfoot as the official state cryptid. (Held without recommendation in the Assembly Arts, Entertainment, Sports, and Tourism Committee)

AB 1334 (Wallis, 2025) establishes solar energy as the official state energy. (Pending in the Senate Governmental Organization Committee)

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: No Local: No

SUPPORT:

None received

OPPOSITION:

None received