

Students put a bug in lawmakers' ears

Cumberland kids petition to make firefly the state insect

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Students at Cumberland Elementary School in West Lafayette have created a petition they hope will create more momentum in their quest to name the Say's firefly Indiana's state insect.

A student-driven project first started in the 2014-2015 school year, the petition aims to garner support across the state, according to Maggie Samudio, a second-grade teacher at Cumberland who's helped lead the project.

Samudio said the school now has the support of Kevin Cross, an agriculture teacher in Sullivan County who recently asked how he could help. Although legislative assistants told Samudio it would be a waste of time, Cross said, "Even if the legislators don't pay a lot of attention to it, people will."

And people, he said, will reach out to their legislators.

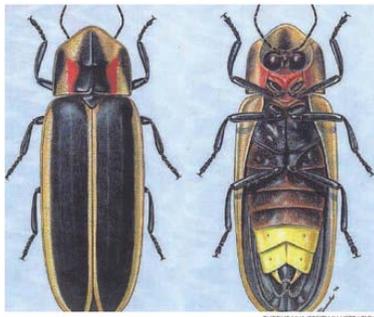
"It was a vehicle to get the word out all over the state," Samudio said. So they formed the petition, which can be found at bit.ly/2cQTdq5, and began sharing it online.

"State symbols are points of pride for Hoosiers. For many Hoosiers, fireflies foster feelings of childhood fun, family gatherings, and enjoying nature," the petition reads.

Samudio's students this summer also wrote a letter, which they copied and mailed in hand-addressed envelopes to more than 500 Indiana schools, encouraging them to sign and share the petition.

Those efforts are just the latest in the movement to recognize the Say's firefly.

Last year, state Sen. Ron Alting, R-Lafayette, authored a Senate bill. State Reps. Sheila Klinker, D-Lafayette, and Randy Truitt, R-West Lafayette, co-authored a House bill to show bipartisan support.



Say's firefly took its name in the 1800s from self-taught naturalist Thomas Say from Posey County.

PURDUE UNIVERSITY ILLUSTRATION

And in January, Cumberland students went to the Statehouse to persuade lawmakers in a natural resources committee to name the firefly, also known by its scientific name as *Pyrractomena angulata*, as the official state insect. Indiana is one of three states that currently does not have one.

“We’ve got a problem. All these states have a state insect, but we don’t have one. How can we get one?” Samudio recalls one of her students, Kayla Xu, asking.

Named by naturalist Thomas Say of Posey County in the 1800s, the lightning bug best represents Indiana because of its agricultural benefits and place in American history, several students told the committee.

Committee Chairman Rep. Sean Eberhart, R-Shelbyville, at the time said he was more than happy to have the students present their ideas. But he said last year was not the time to vote on an official insect.

“I felt that maybe we didn’t have the chance to have a full debate discussion on what insect that may be,” said Eberhart. “My suggestion was to take it to a summer study committee, to have a full debate, and then maybe come back next session to actually vote on a state insect.”

But the discussion never made it to summer study, according to Samudio.

That hasn’t deterred Cumberland and its supporters.

So far, Samudio and her students this summer have petitioned the West Lafayette City Council, Benton County Board of Commissioners and Purdue Student Government, all of which have approved resolutions supporting the movement. Samudio also said she expects Klinker and Alting will introduce bills during the 2017 General Assembly.

Samudio feels this year might be the year.

“This thing has grown from just one question to a state movement,” she said.

According to Samudio, naming the lightning bug the state insect could have huge impact for Indiana — from tourism to cancer and multiple sclerosis research, from farming to electric alternatives. It might even reach the heights of outer space one day, she said, explaining that her students have asked how the chemical the firefly produces might react in space.

“The educational impact and implications of this ... we’ve just hit the tip of the iceberg here,” she said.

And despite some dragging of feet at the Statehouse, Samudio said students and supporters are more energized than ever.

“We’re not giving up.”



State Rep. Sheila Klinker visited Maggie Samudio's second-grade class Tuesday. During the summer, Samudio's students won resolutions from West Lafayette City Council, Benton County Board of Commissioners and Purdue Student Government to make the firefly Indiana's state insect.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY MAGGIE SAMUDIO



Samudio's students are looking beyond their petition, thought up by Kayla Xu, left. Her class has asked how the bug's chemical reaction might work in space.

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