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Firefly proposal finds southern support

Posey County, New Harmony groups lend their backing to West Lafayette students

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EVANSVILLE - For students at Cumberland Elementary School in West Lafayette, the new year will bring a chance for redemption as they continue their efforts to name a state insect for Indiana.

At the center of their cause is Say's firefly, or *pyractomena angulata*. The insect was named by the scientist Thomas Say during his time cataloging and researching in New Harmony.

For about two years, the Cumberland Elementary students have researched, campaigned and petitioned to make Say's firefly the state insect. They even had a draft of the bill considered before the Natural Resources Committee in January. The bill did not pass, but the students aren't giving up on Say's firefly just yet.

This year's efforts are coming with widespread support not only from the West Lafayette area, but also from Southern Indiana and, particularly, Posey County and New Harmony.

Several groups including the New Harmony Town Council, Visit Posey County and the New Harmony Association of Interpreters are looking to support the cause this year. Sen. Jim Tomes, R-49, cosponsored the unsuccessful bill last year and plans to continue supporting the efforts and rallying some reinforcements in the Posey County area too.

For Maggie Samudio, the second-grade teacher aiding her student's cause, seeing her students fight for a cause and learn from the process has been a joy to behold.

"You should see these kids. They are amazing," she said. "How many second, third and now fourth graders have had a bill considered at the statehouse?"

Samudio's journey began in the 2014-2015 with a precocious student named Kayla Xu, now in fourth grade. The question came during Samudio's annual 50 States project, where her students research a state and find interesting information making them unique. Xu was thirsty for knowledge and wanted to learn about every state, so Samudio helped her research several topics to help her winnow down her options.

Xu came back to school puzzled after learning Indiana was only one of a few states without a state insect. Samudio researched how to name a state insect and pitched the idea of rallying behind Say's Firefly on their own to become the state insect.

Their efforts snowballed from there with support from parents, members of the West Lafayette community, Purdue University's Department of Entomology, Purdue's student government and several state legislators.

Tomes, a republican from Posey County, said naming Say's firefly the state insect is important for Posey County because of the historic ties to the area. He added that if Indiana has a state pie, it can have a state insect.

"It's important. It isn't going to cost the state a lot of money. It's not a waste of time," he said. "It's good to see we have little kids who have an interest in the state of Indiana. It's a wholesome goal and worthwhile effort."

Several groups in New Harmony will be showing their support for the students in the coming year. David Flanders, New Harmony Town Council member, said the town council will discuss offering a resolution of support for the students.

Flanders added that making Say's firefly the state insect would also highlight New Harmony in a positive way.

"We love our fireflies. Being right along the river, we have the right conditions for them. We have beautiful summer events where the trees are sparkling with fireflies," he said. "We love to highlight New Harmony's role and how back in the 1820's it was the center of scientific inquiry."



Kayla Xu, second from left, with the Benton County Commissioners, rallies for their support of Say's Firefly as the state insect.

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