



# NEW DEMOCRAT

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### *MEDIA RELEASE*

**For Immediate Release**

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#### **Comox Valley MLA Leonard introduces legislation that would adopt local fossil as a provincial symbol**

**VICTORIA** – MLA Ronna-Rae Leonard has introduced a private members bill to adopt the elasmosaur as BC's provincial fossil. The bill would add a section to the existing *Provincial Symbols and Honours Act* to recognize the fossil, known scientifically as the *Elasmosauridae*, as a symbol of the Province of BC if passed.

"It is truly an honour to bring this piece of legislation forward to the House" said Ronna-Rae Leonard, MLA for Courtenay-Comox. "The elasmosaur find was a significant and important paleontological discovery, and it has been a symbol of my riding for years. I am thrilled that we are taking steps forward to recognize its importance across British Columbia."

The first elasmosaur fossil was found in November 1988 by Mike Trask and his daughter Heather, who were looking for fossils along the Puntledge River. Its discovery marked the first fossil of its kind found west of the Canadian Rockies. The elasmosaur is a large marine reptile dating back to the Cretaceous period; approximately 80 million years ago. Since this initial find, another elasmosaur was found in Comox Valley by Pat Trask in 2020. Both elasmosaurs are on display at the Courtenay and District Museum and Paleontology Centre.

"British Columbia has a rich and diverse paleontology history, and I am pleased to see the adoption of the provincial fossil come forward as a private members bill," said Lana Popham, the Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport. "Fossils play an important role in science education, industry, and tourism in our province. The adoption of a provincial fossil will help recognize this importance, while adding to BC's cultural identity."

The British Columbia Paleontological Alliance proposed the adoption of a provincial fossil to recognize BC's ancient ecosystems, and the current and ongoing paleontological work that occurs across BC. The list of proposed fossils included seven species, ranging from small plants and animals, to large animals, including the elasmosaur. After a period of public input in 2018, the elasmosaur had gathered 48% of votes.

"The elasmosaur has inspired young fossil enthusiasts in the Comox Valley for decades, and we are thrilled that it will now be showcased across BC for generations to come," said Deborah Griffiths, the Executive Director of the Courtenay and District Museum and Paleontology Centre. "The fossil is a symbol of the remarkable ancient history of the province, while encouraging people to pursue and support STEAM education."

Private Members' Bills are pieces of legislation introduced by members of the Legislative Assembly who are not members of the Executive Council. The bill must go through several stages of consideration, including three readings and committee stage, before all

members of the House vote on it. Once voted on, the bill must receive Royal Assent from the Lieutenant Governor before becoming law.

This bill, referred to as M207 until passed, has now passed the first reading stage.

**Learn more:**

The Courtenay and District Museum and Paleontology Centre: <https://www.courtenaymuseum.ca/fossils-dinosaurs/the-elamosaur-find/>

Designation of a Provincial Fossil, BC Government: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/natural-resource-use/fossilmanagement/designating-a-provincial-fossil>