

Lake Superior agates. Common loons. Pink and white lady's slippers and Norway pines. Walleyes and wild rice. All are characteristic of Minnesota, and all capture the essence of the state. Over the course of Minnesota's statehood, the Legislature has adopted 19 such symbols to identify the state's great resources and quality of life.

The State Seal

On May 25, 1858 — two weeks after Minnesota became a state — then-Secretary of State Francis Baasen said to Gov. Henry H. Sibley that, “My office being without a seal, I can of course do no official act unless you make some direction in the matter.”

In the short term, the territorial seal was used until a new design could be agreed upon. The 1861 Legislature approved a design that became law.

Essential elements of the territorial seal — including a white settler plowing a field near the Mississippi River and an American Indian riding a horse toward a setting sun — remained largely intact until 1983 when the Legislature decreed that the American Indian should face the settler by riding south rather than fleeing west.

A 2023 law charged a State Emblems Redesign Commission to develop and adopt a new state seal and flag that “accurately and respectfully reflect Minnesota’s shared history, resources, and diverse cultural communities.”

The seal now features images of state symbols including wild rice and the common loon. Additionally a white, four-pointed star represents the Star of the North, or, “L'étoile du Nord,” the state motto. Trees and water represent the state’s abundance of both.

“Mni Sóta Makoce” represents historical roots of the state’s name. It is Dakota

for “Land of the sky tinted water” or “Land where the waters reflect the skies.” ▼

The State Flag

The current state flag was adopted on Dec. 19, 2023, by a commission whose charge included designing a flag that “accurately and respectfully reflect Minnesota’s shared history, resources, and diverse cultural communities.”



It includes a white, 8-point star within a dark blue background that is similar in shape to the state’s outline. The star represents the North Star and the dark blue represents the night sky. The bright blue field on the right represents water.

More than 2,600 proposals were offered by the public. One submitted by Andrew Prekker from Luverne provided the base design.

Supporters claim the previous flag — largely the state seal on a blue background — was offensive to Native Americans. Additionally, they said the flag’s aesthetics were poor and it regularly rated low amongst flags across the United States.

The previous version of the flag included three dates: 1819 to signify the establishment of historic Fort Snelling in 1858, the year Minnesota became a state, and 1893 when the



MINNESOTA STATE
GOVERNMENT SERIES
2

State Symbols

flag was adopted. Nineteen stars on the flag symbolized Minnesota as the 19th state to be admitted to the Union after the original 13. ▼

The State Bird

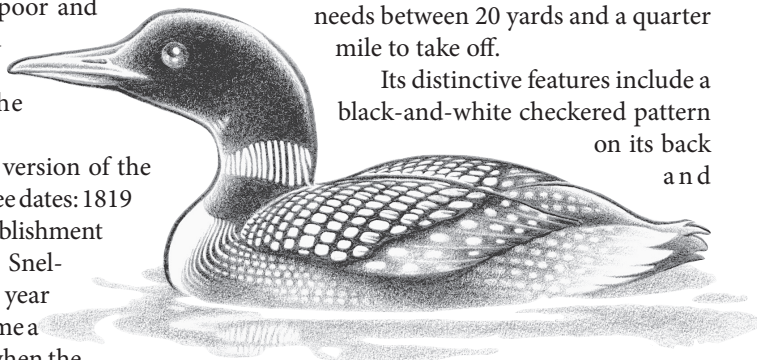
The Legislature adopted the common loon as the state bird in 1961.

The sleek-looking bird can attain speeds of up to 60 mph and can travel great distances under water. The loon’s legs are near the rear of its body, enabling it to dive under water quickly, quietly and with great speed.

But its legs weren’t made for walking. The loon earned its name from the old English word “lumme,” meaning awkward person. The loon ventures on land only when nesting and breeding. And even then, the nest is always near the water.

Its wings are also very small. As a result, the loon, which averages about 9 pounds, needs between 20 yards and a quarter mile to take off.

Its distinctive features include a black-and-white checkered pattern on its back and



an intense red eye, which is found only in adults. Its head is a dark green but is often mistaken for black. The description applies to both males and females, making it difficult to distinguish them.

Loons are loners and prefer Minnesota's isolated lakes, leading some to label their distinctive call as "the loneliest voice on earth." ▼

The State Flower

You might think twice before picking the Minnesota state flower — the pink and white lady's slipper. In 1922, the Legislature passed a law making it illegal to pick the rare flower that is typically found in the swamps, bogs and damp woods of northern Minnesota.

In 1893, a group of women preparing an exhibit of the state's products for the World's Fair in Chicago

decided they should have a state flower to adorn their display.



They petitioned legislators to adopt the wild lady's slipper as the state flower, and the Legislature complied. But several years later, officials discovered that the *wild* lady's slipper named in law didn't grow in Minnesota.

So during the 1902 special session of the Legislature, a new resolution was adopted that changed the state flower to the pink and white lady's slipper.

A member of the orchid family, the pink and white lady's slipper is one of Minnesota's rarest wildflowers. It blooms in late June or early July, and it takes between four and 16 years

before the plant produces a flower. Under the right conditions, lady's slippers can live for more than 100 years. The pink and white lady's slipper can grow to a height of 3 feet and is the tallest of the state's lady's slippers. ▼

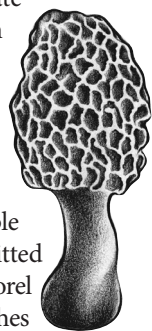
The State Mushroom

The *morchella esculenta*, commonly known as the morel, sponge mushroom or honeycomb morel, became Minnesota's state mushroom

in 1984. The morel is considered one of the most highly prized and delicious of all edible mushrooms.

The morel's cups resemble cone-shaped sponges, pitted like a honeycomb. The morel is usually 4 inches to 8 inches high.

It grows from early May to early June in the Twin Cities metropolitan area among leaves or wood ashes in open woods, along roadsides and in partially shaded meadowland. ▼



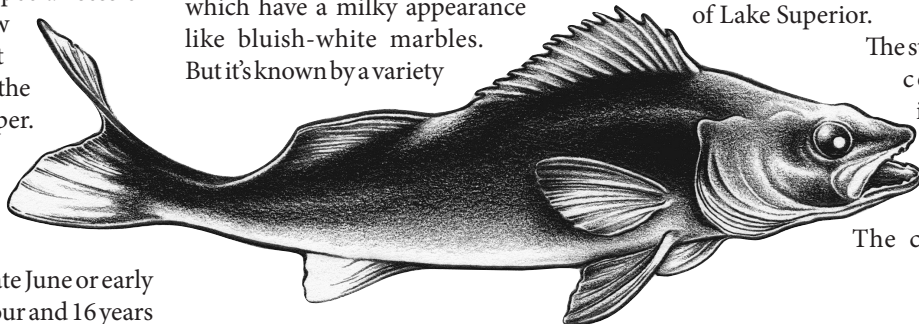
The State Fish

Of all Minnesota's state symbols, none is more eagerly sought after than the walleye — the official state fish.

Every year in Minnesota, more than 1 million anglers take to the water on one of the state's 1,700 walleye lakes in pursuit of the elusive walleye.

In May 1965, the Legislature adopted the walleye as the state fish. It was chosen for its value to both sport and commercial fishing.

The walleye gets its name from its eyes, which have a milky appearance like bluish-white marbles. But it's known by a variety



of other names, too — yellow pike, yellow perchpike and yellow pickerel.

Minnesota's record walleye, caught in 1979 in the Sea Gull River at Saganaga Lake in Cook County, weighed 17 pounds, 8 ounces and was 35.75 inches long. ▼

The State Soil

Although it's only found in 17 counties located in south-central Minnesota, Lester was designated the state soil in 2012.

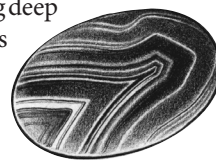
Named because of its prevalence in the area around Lester Prairie, the soil is well-drained and formed in loamy, calcareous glacial till on ground moraines. Principal crops grown in Lester soil are corn and soybeans.

According to the Minnesota Association of Professional Soil Scientists, the impetus behind the naming of a state soil is to celebrate "a century of soil science at the University of Minnesota," as well as the 40th anniversary of MAPSS. The association chose the dirt as the state's unofficial soil back in 1987. ▼

The State Gemstone

Although the Legislature didn't adopt the Lake Superior agate as the official state gemstone until 1969, agates were being formed about a billion years before that.

As the North American continent began to split apart due to molten rock moving deep beneath the earth's surface, iron-rich lava poured out of the huge crevasses. These flows are now exposed along the north and south shores of Lake Superior.



The stone's red color comes from iron, the major industrial mineral in the state. The concentration

of iron, and the extent to which the iron has oxidized, determines the color of the stone. Puddles of quartz-rich solutions that crystallize inside the gas pocket under low fluid pressure cause the white bands that are typically found in agates. The parallel nature of the bands indicates the agate's position inside the lava flow.

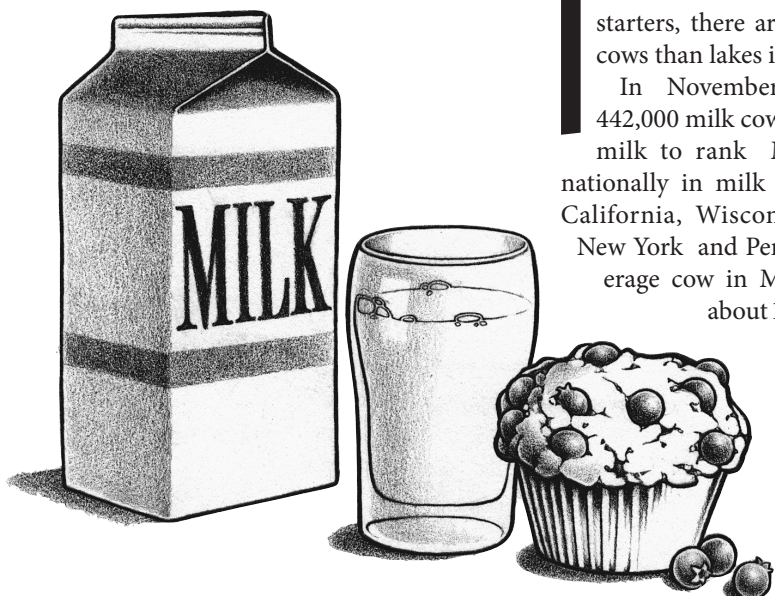
Characteristics of the agate include a glossy, waxy appearance, a pitted surface texture and iron-oxide staining. The stone is translucent. ▼

The State Muffin

As an exercise to see how a bill becomes law, a class of third-graders from South Terrace Elementary School in Carlton, Minn., proposed that the blueberry muffin be designated as the state muffin.

In 1988, their bill was signed into law. The idea for the blueberry muffin bill arose in a social studies class when the third graders were studying the state's symbols.

They asked themselves a question: If Minnesota were to have a state food, what would it be? The answer they gave was the blueberry muffin. They reasoned that wild blueberries are plentiful and popular in northern Minnesota, and farmers from across the state grow wheat. ▼



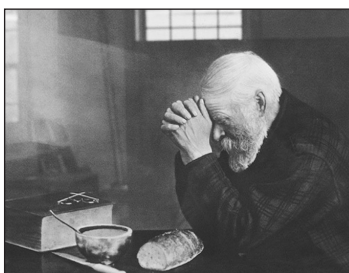
The State Photograph

A world-renowned photograph became the state's 14th state symbol in 2002.

Shot in Bovey, Minn., by Eric Enstrom in 1918, "Grace" features an elderly man sitting pensively with his head bowed and hands folded. He is leaning over a table, and on the table is a pair of spectacles resting atop a thick book, a bowl of gruel, a loaf of bread and a knife.

A copy of the state photograph is displayed in the Office of the Secretary of State in St. Paul.

Enstrom shot the photograph in black and white, but as "Grace" became more popular Enstrom's daughter, Rhoda Nyberg, began hand painting the prints in oil. ▼



The State Drink

In 1984, the Legislature designated milk as the official state drink. Why? For starters, there are many more dairy cows than lakes in the state.

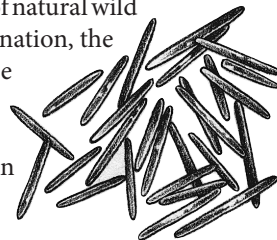
In November 2024, Minnesota's 442,000 milk cows produced enough milk to rank Minnesota seventh nationally in milk production behind California, Wisconsin, Idaho, Texas, New York and Pennsylvania. The average cow in Minnesota produced about 1,955 pounds of milk per month in 2023.

While state whey production is increasing, the greatest percentage of milk produced is used to make butter, cheese, ice cream and yogurt. ▼

The State Grain

For centuries, wild rice has been a staple for the American Indians of northern Minnesota.

To recognize that, and the fact that Minnesota is a leading producer of natural wild rice in the nation, the Legislature adopted wild rice as the state grain in 1977.



Wild rice, which is really a grain, grows naturally in the many lakes and rivers in the northern half of the state.

Like oats, the grain of wild rice is surrounded by a hull that is removed during processing.

The Ojibwe word for rice is "manomin," whose root word is "mano," or spirit — an indication of how important the rice was and is to the Ojibwe.

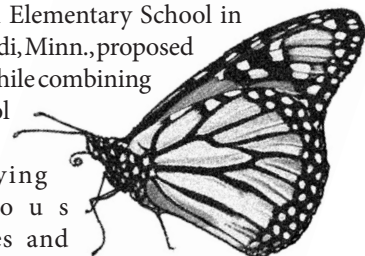
The rice was traditionally harvested by women in late August and early September. Today, the season is regulated by the Department of Natural Resources.

Sticks or flails, no longer than 30 inches long, are used to bend the wild rice grass into a boat or canoe. The stalks are then gently flailed to knock the grains loose and into the boat or canoe. ▼

The State Butterfly

Minnesota may not be the only place where the Monarch butterfly is easily spotted, but the popular fluttering insect was named the state butterfly by the Legislature in 2000.

A group of fourth-graders from O.H. Anderson Elementary School in Mahtomedi, Minn., proposed the idea while combining two school projects — studying various butterflies and learning about the lawmaking process.



The Monarch is one of six popular families of butterflies in Minnesota. Distinguished by their distinctive orange-brown wings, marked by black veins and a black border with two rows of spots, Monarchs cannot stand the cold winters here and will migrate south to Mexico every fall. Those that survive the winter travel north to Minnesota and Canada throughout the spring, laying eggs along the way. August is the best month to see Monarchs in Minnesota. ▼

The State Fruit

An assignment to write a persuasive letter led to the Honeycrisp apple being deemed the state fruit in 2006. Fourth-grade students from Andersen Elementary School in Bayport, Minn., and their teacher, Laurel Avery, testified and sat in on House and Senate committee hearings on the bill throughout the process. They were also present in the House gallery for the bill's passage.

The Honeycrisp apple was produced from a 1960 cross of the Macoun and Honeygold varieties, as part of a University of Minnesota apple breeding program aimed to develop fruit that could thrive in colder climates. The original seedling was planted in 1962, and the Honeycrisp apple was formally introduced in 1991. ▼

The State Tree

Many people are familiar with the description that American Indians gave to the Mississippi River: father of waters. But far fewer know that the Ojibwe refer to Norway, or red, pine trees as "grandfathers."

In 1953, Minnesota adopted the Norway pine as the state tree. Norway pines



typically reach heights of 80 feet and diameters of up to 3 feet; exceptional trees have grown as high as 150 feet and as wide as 5 feet.

Two Norway pines vie for the largest in the state. Standing at 120 feet, both are in northern Minnesota.

It's called a red pine because of the pale red color of its heartwood and the reddish color of its bark. ▼

The State Sport

Since its inception, the Minnesota Wild has referenced Minnesota as the State of Hockey.

In 2009, the Legislature made ice hockey the official state sport — two years after fifth-graders from Groveland Elementary School in Minnetonka, Minn., proffered the idea.

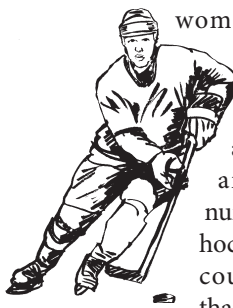
In addition to the Wild, which began play in the National Hockey League in October 2000, the state has a professional

women's team that began play in 2024, five Division I collegiate men's and women's teams, and the greatest number of high school hockey players in the country with more than 9,000 participants

on 110 girls and 145 boys teams during the 2023-24 school year. Minnesota had 49,884 registered 18-and-under hockey players for the 2022-23 season, the most in the nation, according to USA Hockey.

St. Paul-native Herb Brooks, who also coached at the University of Minnesota and for the Minnesota North Stars (the state's former NHL team), led the U.S. hockey team to a gold medal at the 1980 Winter Olympics, often referred to as the "Miracle on Ice."

The United States Hockey Hall of Fame is located in Eveleth. ▼



The State Song

You rarely hear it on the radio, and it has never made the top 40, but that doesn't mean it's not a popular song — especially among Minnesotans.

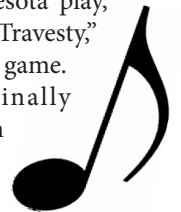
"Hail! Minnesota," has been the state song since 1945.

It dates back to 1904 when it was sung in a University of Minnesota play, "The Apple of Discord, a Travesty," a comedy about a football game.

The song was originally written by student Truman E. Rickard, then later rewritten by another student, Arthur Upson.

Through the 1920s, legislators battled over state song proposals and considered at least four, but reached no agreement. Finally, "Hail! Minnesota" was proposed.

In 1945, the university gave permission to the state to use it, as did Rickard (Upson had died). Then the words were changed slightly from "Hail to thee our college dear," to "Hail to thee our state so dear." ▼



The State Bee

Once widespread across the eastern United States and Upper Midwest, the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee population has declined by nearly 90 percent since 2000 and the bee has become the first in the nation to be classified as endangered.

It remains in only about a dozen states.

Minnesota is home to much of the remaining population, and in 2019 it became the official state bee.

Active from April through October, Rusty Patched Bumble Bees live in colonies that include a single queen. All Rusty Patched Bumble Bees have black heads, but workers and males have a small rust-colored spot centrally located on their back.

The designation aims to raise awareness about the role of pollinators in Minnesota's ecosystems and the importance of conservation of their habitats. ▼

