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Megalodon for State Shark

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Maryland hopes to become the first state to designate a state shark. They've already got one in mind: the now-extinct *Otodus megalodon*.

A bill being introduced this year—sponsored by Senator Jack Bailey and House Delegate Todd Morgan—

would make megalodon Maryland's state shark.

"On March 12 and 17, we will appear before both House and Senate committees to make our case for why meg should be our state shark," says Stephen Godfrey, PhD, curator of Paleontology for Calvert Marine Museum in Solomons.. "With committee approval, it will move to the full House and Senate."

Large fossilized teeth of megalodon—a prehistoric shark believed to have grown to nearly 80 feet in length—have been discovered in at least seven Maryland counties.

“Megalodon would have lived in the Atlantic Ocean, which during the Miocene epoch (local Miocene age

sediments are about 20-8 million years old) flooded over the eastern half of the State of Maryland,” Godfrey says.

If you’re on the hunt for fossilized megalodon teeth—many the size of an adult human hand—they’ve been found on cliffs along the Chesapeake Bay and in the rivers and tributaries flowing into the Bay.

“These rivers are cutting through the sediments that were laid down over millions of years when megalodon lived and hunted in these waters,” Godfrey says. “Meg teeth are found in those fossil-rich layers, which erode naturally. There are only a few places along Calvert Cliffs where people can go to even see these cliffs, let alone find meg teeth. Check out Calvert Cliffs at Flag Ponds, Matoaka Beach Cottages, and Calvert Cliffs State Park.”

To see a reconstructed jaw with real meg teeth, as well as a reconstructed skeleton of meg and associated exhibits, visit Calvert Marine Museum in Solomons.

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Megalodon could become Maryland's official state shark

The 66,000-pound prehistoric predator once stalked the Bay State's waters.

[Laura Baisas](#)

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Megalodons went extinct about 3.6 million years ago, but their fossils are all over Maryland. Artwork by Nick Pike. Photo by DeAgostini/Getty Images

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In a state better known for its delicious [seafood](#) and as the home of the United States Navy, there's a new effort to create the country's first state shark. Earlier this month, Maryland State Senator Jack Bailey and House Delegate Todd Morgan filed [SB135](#) to designate the [megalodon](#) (*Otodus megalodon*) as the official state shark.

While the mighty megalodon is not swimming along the shores of the Bay State now, the enormous prehistoric shark relative once dominated the [shallow seas that covered Maryland and the rest of the Atlantic coastal plain](#). They lived about 23 million years ago (during the Miocene Epoch), before going extinct about 3.6 million years ago. They were about three times [bigger than a modern great white shark](#). Some estimates put them upwards of 82 feet long and 66,000 pounds. They primarily ate whales and the ancestors of dolphins and manatees, while their young hunted seals.

But why should “the meg” be the state shark of Maryland? The beaches along southern Maryland are full of megalodon fossils—particularly their [giant teeth](#). Megalodon teeth have been found in several counties including Anne Arundel, Caroline, Calvert, Charles, Dorchester, Prince George’s, and St. Mary’s. Citizen scientists and paleontologists alike have also uncovered teeth from [other non-megalodon prehistoric shark species](#) including *Galeocerdo contortus* and *Galeocerdo triqueter* (similar to modern day tiger sharks) and *Sphyrma prisca* (a relative of the hammer head shark).



An assortment of fossilized shark teeth, as photographed by Dennis Garcia and submitted to the 2013 DNR Photo Contest. *Image: Dennis Garcia / Maryland Department of Natural*

Resources.

[Calvert Cliffs State Park](#) in southern Maryland is a common spot for digging up teeth and the Calvert Marine Museum has a number of fossils on display. Paleontologists believe that Maryland was once a [whale and dolphin calving ground](#) and nursery for hungry megalodons. A roughly 15-million-year-old fractured whale vertebrae and tooth uncovered in Calvert Cliffs even shows [evidence of a possible megalodon attack](#).

“Turns out no state has a state shark, so we’re hoping Maryland is the first,” Dr. Stephen Godfrey, curator of paleontology at southern Maryland’s Calvert Marine Museum, [told WMAR Baltimore](#). “To me, this is such an iconic animal. I think it’s time for megalodon to take center stage as the first shark designated as a state shark.”

If the bill is approved by Maryland’s General Assembly and signed by Governor Wes Moore, the designation would take effect October 1, 2026. The megalodon would join Maryland’s other state symbols, including the [Baltimore oriole](#) (state bird), [jousting](#) (state sport), and [walking](#) (state exercise).

9-year-old Maryland girl discovers 'once-in-a-lifetime' megalodon tooth

By Zoe Sottile, CNN

3 min read

Updated 7:37 PM EST, Sun January 15, 2023



9-year-old Molly Sampson discovered a massive 5-inch megalodon tooth on Christmas at Maryland's Calvert Cliffs State Park.

Alicia Sampson

CNN —

A 9-year-old aspiring paleontologist found [the find of a lifetime on Christmas morning](#): a massive 5-inch tooth from a prehistoric megalodon.



[Molly Sampson](#), a fourth grader from Prince Frederick, Maryland, made the astonishing find on Calvert Beach.

Molly told CNN that she has spent years combing Maryland's beaches for shark teeth, inspired by her father's love of fossils.

"They're just cool because they're really old," she said.

Molly's mother Alicia Sampson added that her daughter has long harbored a love of exploring the outdoors. "She loves treasure hunting," she explained.

Maryland's Calvert Cliffs State Park is known as a hotspot for fossil finding, Alicia Sampson added.

For Christmas, Molly asked her parents for cold-water waders so that she could hunt for shark teeth and other fossils in the Chesapeake Bay. Equipped with her new gear, she set out at 9:30 a.m. to search for the remnants of ancient predators.

"I saw something big, and it looked like a shark tooth," she said. "We were about knee deep in the water."

She explained that she tried to grab the tooth with a sifting tool, but it was too big. She was "amazed" when she realized just how large the tooth was. "I was so excited and surprised."



Paleontology curator Stephen Godfrey told CNN that Molly's discovery was a "once-in-a-lifetime kind of find."

Alicia Sampson

The Sampsons took their exciting find to [the Calvert Marine Museum](#), where paleontology curator Stephen Godfrey confirmed their suspicions: It was indeed the tooth of a megalodon, [the massive sharks that lived more than 23 million years ago](#).

Godfrey told CNN that there are usually only five or six megalodon teeth comparable in size to Molly's find discovered along Calvert Cliffs each year.

"There are people that can spend a lifetime and not find a tooth the size Molly found," he said.

"This is like a once-in-a-lifetime kind of find."

Amateur fossil hunters typically find around 100 megalodon teeth on Calvert Cliffs per year, he added. But most of them are much smaller than Molly's huge tooth. The largest megalodon teeth ever found have been just over 7 inches.

The size of the tooth indicates that this particular megalodon was between 45 and 50 feet long.

Godfrey explained that millions of years ago, the waters off Calvert Cliffs would have been home to whales and dolphins that would have served as bountiful prey for megalodons

looking to eat. Because sharks replace their teeth over the course of their lives and because the teeth are made up of hardy enamel, they are “by far the most abundant vertebrate fossil.”

Megalodons hold a particular fascination for humans because they served as the “apex predator on Earth” for millions of years, he said.

Both Godfrey and Alicia Sampson said they hope Molly’s find helps inspire other children, especially girls, to pursue their scientific interests.

“This will inspire people of all ages, children included, to pursue their natural inclination in nature, art music, there’s so many possibilities that are available to us today,” said Godfrey.

Alicia Sampson said children around the globe have sent letters to Molly sharing their excitement at her discovery. She set up [an Instagram page to share her daughters’ outdoor adventures](#).

“We really want to reach other kids and get them excited about like being outside,” she said.

Molly said she hopes to display the huge tooth in a shadowbox in her room – and one day hopes to become a paleontologist.