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State bird, state flower ... now a state firearm?

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Virtually all states have a state bird, a state flower and a state motto. But Utah soon could be among the first to have an official state firearm — the Browning model 1911 .45-caliber handgun, designed by Utah gunmaker John Moses Browning.

Rep. Carl Wimmer, R-Herriman — a former police officer, a life member of the National Rifle Association and an instructor for concealed weapons classes — wants to take a shot at creating that designation when the Legislature convenes next month. At least one anti-gun-violence group bemoans the move but sees no real harm.

“It would be very appropriate going into 2011 because it is the 100-year anniversary of the Browning model 1911,” Wimmer said. “It has a rich history. It was in every war from World War I to World War II, Korea, Vietnam and all the recent wars. It is still used by some military units and many police agencies.”

Wimmer said he believes some other states also have state firearms but could not name any specifically. Comprehensive websites about state symbols do not list any.

And when a Pennsylvania lawmaker proposed designating a state firearm there this year (to honor the Pennsylvania long rifle), news stories said that would create the first official state firearm in the country. That effort appears to have failed while creating some controversy with anti-violence groups, so Utah now could be the first.

“As to how the outside world views Utah, it again shows how Utah worships guns at all turns of the road,” said Gary Sackett, spokesman for the Utah Center for the Prevention of Gun Violence.

“But it is probably true that this particular firearm has an historical place, so I don’t think the bill goes to the core of what concerns us about firearm safety,” he said. “It is troubling that it places firearms on such a pedestal, but otherwise it is probably harmless.”

Wimmer says he owns a version of the gun himself, “and Browning was far ahead of his time with this model. Its style, functionality and durability made it the most efficient and effective handgun for the last



FILE PHOTO | The Salt Lake Tribune Rep. Carl Wimmer, R-Herriman, wants to designate an official state firearm.

100 years.”

It is a single-action, semiautomatic, magazine-fed and recoil-operated handgun. It became the standard-issue side arm for U.S. armed forces from 1911 to 1985 and is still carried by some U.S. forces. It had few changes since it was originally issued.

“Browning played a role in developing almost every military small arms weapons that we have,” Wimmer said, from various machine guns to automatic rifles and semiautomatic shotguns.

So Wimmer said it would be nice to honor Browning and his 1911 model handgun “and honor how it helped to protect our nation.”

Browning was born in Ogden in 1855 and died in 1926. He is credited with 128 gun patents and made his first firearm at age 13 in his father’s gun shop.

“This is not something that we are going to spend a lot of time doing, and it won’t take time away from more pressing issues,” Wimmer said of his proposal. “I think it is something that we can get done very, very quickly early in the session. I don’t think it will be controversial.”

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Other state symbols

If the Legislature creates a new state handgun, it would join many other state symbols, including:

State Animal • Rocky Mountain elk

State Bird • California seagull

State Cooking Pot • Dutch oven

State Emblem • Beehive

State Fish • Bonneville cutthroat trout

State Flower • Sego lily

State Folk Dance • Square dance

State Fossil • Allosaurus

State Fruit • Cherry

State Gem • Topaz

State Grass • Indian rice grass

State Insect • Honey bee

State Mineral • Copper

State Motto • “Industry”

State Rock • Coal

State Song • “Utah, This Is the Place”

State Hymn • “Utah, We Love Thee”

State Star • Dubhe

State Tartan • Utah State Tartan

State Tree • Blue spruce

State Vegetable • Spanish sweet onion

State Historic Vegetable • Sugar beet

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