
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO STATE SYMBOLS.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that, in 1960, the kukui
2 tree was designated as the official tree of the State. The
3 legislature today continues to recognize the important cultural
4 significance and many uses of the kukui in Hawaii. The
5 legislature also recognizes the unique cultural, ecological, and
6 economic importance and threats to the ‘ōhi‘a lehua (*Metrosideros*
7 *polymorpha*) in Hawaii. As an endemic species, it is only found
8 in the Hawaiian Islands.

9 The legislature further finds that ‘ōhi‘a lehua is a
10 keystone species of Hawaii's native forests. ‘Ōhi‘a is endemic
11 to Hawaii's six largest islands and it occurs in a variety of
12 forms from sea level to over eight thousand feet in elevation,
13 in bogs to deserts. Forests dominated by ‘ōhi‘a are home to at
14 least twenty-two extant species of forest birds, many of which
15 rely on the abundant nectar of the lehua blossoms. The Hawaiian
16 hoary bat and many of Hawaii's remaining native plants and
17 invertebrates also make their home in ‘ōhi‘a forests. ‘Ōhi‘a is



1 very efficient at capturing water from the air and from rainfall
2 which allows fresh water to slowly seep into the ground, making
3 it essential to the recharge of state aquifers and overall
4 ecosystem health from the mountains to the sea.

5 The legislature additionally finds that there are many oli
6 (chants), mele (songs), and hula (dances) relating to 'ōhi'a, and
7 of the sayings compiled in 'Ōlelo No'eau (Hawaiian Proverbs and
8 Poetical Sayings) by the renowned Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena
9 Pukui, only the hala exceeds 'ōhi'a lehua in the number of
10 sayings recorded. 'Ōhi'a lehua blossoms are iconic, symbolizing
11 Pele's fire, the blood of warfare, and the bounty of a generous
12 chief. The beautiful and brilliant flowers make prized lei and
13 are featured in art and clothing design. Historically, the wood
14 of 'ōhi'a was preferred for papa ku'i 'ai (poi boards) and was
15 used to make tools and weapons. It is still regarded as a high-
16 quality wood for construction and furniture.

17 The legislature also finds that, while the ecological and
18 cultural importance of 'ōhi'a lehua is worthy of recognition and
19 appreciation, 'ōhi'a is under threat, including from diseases
20 such as a fungal pathogen called rapid 'ōhi'a death (ROD). ROD
21 has already killed over one million 'ōhi'a trees on the island of



1 Hawaii. In recognition of the importance of protecting 'ōhi'a,
2 new state and federal regulations have been adopted restricting
3 the importation of close relatives of 'ōhi'a, plants in the
4 myrtle family, to prevent new strains of 'ōhi'a diseases from
5 entering Hawaii. Climate change, other invasive species, and
6 other environmental pressures will no doubt pose additional
7 threats to 'ōhi'a in the future.

8 The purpose of this Act is to designate 'ōhi'a lehua as the
9 State endemic tree in order to recognize its cultural and
10 ecological importance and raise awareness of the critical
11 threats to 'ōhi'a with the hope that this awareness will result
12 in effective conservation and healthy 'ōhi'a forests across the
13 Hawaiian Islands.

14 SECTION 2. Chapter 5, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended
15 by adding a new section to be appropriately designated and to
16 read as follows:

17 "§5- State endemic tree. 'Ōhi'a lehua (Metrosideros
18 polymorpha) is adopted, established, and designated as the
19 official endemic tree of the State, to be effective so long as
20 the legislature of the State does not otherwise provide."

21 SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.



H.B. NO. 2202

1 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

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INTRODUCED BY: *Lisa Maiten*
JAN 25 2022



H.B. NO. 2202

Report Title:

Ohia Lehua; State Symbols; Endemic Tree

Description:

Designates ohia lehua as the state endemic tree.

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