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# 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'ēau (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. Rapid 'ōhi'a  
21 death has already killed over one million 'ōhi'a trees on the



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



**1** SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2044.

**2**



H.B. NO. 2202  
H.D. 1

**Report Title:**

Ohia Lehua; State Symbols; Endemic Tree

**Description:**

Designates ohia lehua as the state endemic tree. Effective  
7/1/2044. (HD1)

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