
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 the ‘ōhi‘a lehua
2 (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) is a flowering evergreen that is an
3 endemic plant species found only in the Hawaiian islands. The
4 legislature recognizes the unique cultural, ecological, and
5 economic importance of the ‘ōhi‘a lehua and its threatened
6 existence. The legislature further finds that the ‘ōhi‘a lehua
7 is one of the most referenced plants in Hawaiian mo‘olelo
8 (stories), oli (chants), mele (songs), and hula (dances). ‘Ōhi‘a
9 lehua blossoms are iconic, symbolizing Pele's fire, the blood of
10 warfare, and the bounty of a generous chief. The beautiful and
11 brilliant flowers make prized lei and are featured in art and
12 clothing design. The blossoms and foliage of the ‘ōhi‘a lehua
13 were frequently used for medicinal purposes. Historically, the
14 wood of ‘ōhi‘a was preferred for papa ku‘i ‘ai (poi boards) and
15 was used to make tools and weapons. It is still regarded as a
16 high-quality wood for construction and furniture.



1 The legislature further finds that 'ōhi'a lehua is a
2 keystone species of Hawaii's native forests. It is the most
3 common native tree in the Hawaiian islands. 'Ōhi'a is endemic to
4 Hawaii's six largest islands and grows in a variety of
5 environments, from sea level to over eight thousand feet in
6 elevation, and in diverse ecosystems from bogs to deserts. Its
7 form ranges from short bushy shrubs to one-hundred-foot canopy
8 trees. 'Ōhi'a trees are very efficient at capturing water from
9 the air and rainfall and allowing fresh water to slowly seep
10 into the ground to recharge the aquifers and ecosystems from the
11 mountains to the sea. 'Ōhi'a lehua forests are estimated to cover
12 over 800,000 acres statewide and are vital to protecting and
13 conserving both Hawaii's watersheds and native species.

14 Forests dominated by 'ōhi'a are home to at least twenty-two
15 extant species of forest birds, many of which rely on the
16 abundant nectar of the lehua blossoms. Its nectar is the food
17 for many indigenous species, such as the federally endangered
18 'akohekohe (crested honeycreeper) and the 'ōpe'ape'a (Hawaiian
19 hoary bat), the State's only native land animal. Many of
20 Hawaii's remaining native plants and invertebrates also make
21 their home in 'ōhi'a forests.



1 The legislature also finds that, while the ecological and
2 cultural importance of the 'ōhi'a lehua is worthy of recognition
3 and appreciation, the 'ōhi'a is under threat, including from
4 diseases such as a fungal pathogen called rapid 'ōhi'a death
5 (ROD). ROD has already killed over one million 'ōhi'a trees on
6 the island of Hawaii. In recognition of the importance of
7 protecting 'ōhi'a, new state and federal regulations have been
8 adopted restricting the importation of close relatives of 'ōhi'a,
9 plants in the myrtle family, to prevent new strains of 'ōhi'a
10 diseases from entering Hawaii. Climate change, other invasive
11 species, and other environmental pressures will no doubt pose
12 additional threats to 'ōhi'a in the future.

13 The purpose of this Act is to designate 'ōhi'a lehua as the
14 State endemic tree to recognize its cultural and ecological
15 importance and raise awareness of the critical threats the plant
16 species is currently facing, with the hope that it will lead to
17 effective conservation and growth of healthy 'ōhi'a forests
18 across the Hawaiian islands.



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

4 "§5- State endemic tree. 'Ōhi'a lehua (Metrosideros
5 polymorpha) is adopted, established, and designated as the
6 official endemic tree of the State, to be effective so long as
7 the legislature of the State does not otherwise provide."

8 SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.

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



Report Title:

'Ōhi'a Lehua; State Symbols; Endemic Tree

Description:

Designates the 'ōhi'a lehua as the state endemic tree. (SD1)

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