

JAN 20 2017

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE STATE TREE.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the ‘ōhi‘a lehua
2 tree, also known as *Metrosideros polymorpha*, is a truly unique
3 symbol of Hawaii and the ideal candidate for the state tree.
4 This tree is a keystone of the islands' ecology and indigenous
5 culture. Ecologically speaking, ‘ōhi‘a lehua is an endemic
6 species, found nowhere else in the world, and holds the honor of
7 being the longest living tree in Hawaii forests. Its species
8 epithet, *polymorpha*, alludes to the many growth forms that this
9 tree can take on—from its height to its leaf type to the color
10 of its flowers. These many forms are what allow ‘ōhi‘a lehua to
11 be the only native tree that can be found growing from the
12 coast-line to the tree-line, from dry forests to rain forests,
13 and from the newest lava flows on the island of Hawai‘i to the
14 oldest soils of Kaua‘i and Ni‘ihau. It is estimated that ‘ōhi‘a
15 lehua covers more than one million acres statewide. It is a
16 host to native birds, insects, and the only native land animal



1 the 'ōpe'ape'a, Hawaiian hoary bat, and is one of the most
2 important co-evolutionary partners to help create dozens of
3 Hawaii's biological treasures found only in the islands.

4 The legislature further finds that the magnificence and
5 beauty of 'ōhi'a lehua holds historical and cultural
6 significance. It is the most frequently mentioned plant in
7 Hawaiian poetry, song, and chant. Hawaiians tell its origin
8 story of two lovers destroyed by lava who came back joined in
9 one body form, with the strong wood being the male and the
10 delicate flower the female. Because of this, 'ōhi'a lehua has
11 become a symbol of rebirth after devastation and of the
12 necessary balance between masculine and feminine.

13 Beyond symbolism, 'ōhi'a lehua is the foundation of a
14 plethora of customs and traditions. Most notably, its hard wood
15 is used for tools and construction while its foliage and flowers
16 are used in many kinds of lei and other adornment. The role of
17 'ōhi'a lehua in Hawaii's natural and cultural history, along with
18 its enduring presence in Hawaii's forests and its awe-inspiring
19 grandeur and beauty have resulted in this tree being embraced by
20 many who now call Hawaii home. It is for these reasons and more



1 that this tree is one of the most important trees to Hawaii's
2 indigenous culture.

3 The legislature also finds that today, rapid 'ōhi'a death
4 threatens 'ōhi'a lehua on the island of Hawaii and potentially
5 across the State. This disease is caused by the fungus
6 *Ceratocystis fimbriata* and has killed hundreds of thousands of
7 'ōhi'a lehua trees across more than thirty-four thousand acres.

8 The purpose of this Act is to designate 'ōhi'a lehua as the
9 official state tree.

10 SECTION 2. Section 5-8, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
11 amended to read as follows:

12 "§5-8 **State tree.** The [~~kukui tree, also known as the~~
13 ~~candlenut tree (Aleurites Moluccana),~~] ohia lehua tree
14 (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) is adopted, established, and
15 designated as the official tree of the State, to be effective so
16 long as the legislature of the State does not otherwise
17 provide."

18 SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
19 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

20



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

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INTRODUCED BY:

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S.B. NO. 697

Report Title:

State Tree; Ohia Lehua

Description:

Designates the ohia lehua tree as the official tree of the State.

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