



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

300 Ala Moana Blvd., Room 3-511 Box 50187, Honolulu, HI 96850
Phone: 808 792-9530 Fax: 808 792-9583

For Release: March 17, 2009
Contact: Ken Foote, 808 792 9535 or 282 9442

PIEA-08-04
RO-09-23

Rare Moloka'i Plant Receives Federal Protection

A rare Moloka'i plant, known only by its scientific name *Phyllostegia hispida*, was designated an endangered species today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. *Phyllostegia hispida* is found only in the wet forests of eastern Moloka'i in the Hawaiian Islands.

"Now that this rare plant species is protected by both federal and state laws, it is our hope that it will come to the forefront of public attention along with Hawai'i's other numerous endangered plants," said Patrick Leonard, field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service's Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office.

Phyllostegia hispida has rarely been seen in the wild. From 1910 to 1996, a total of 10 individuals were recorded, but in subsequent years died for various reasons. Since 1997, surveys failed to locate additional individuals and the species was thought to be extirpated until 2005 when two seedlings were discovered at The Nature Conservancy's Kamakou Preserve.

Since 2007, 24 wild plants have been discovered (23 in the Kamakou Preserve, 1 in the State's Pu'u Ali'i Natural Area Reserve), and over one hundred individuals produced from cuttings have been outplanted in the Kamakou Preserve. A total of 238 plants are known to exist today.

The most significant threat is the species' low numbers, which make it particularly susceptible to extinction from random events such as hurricanes and disease outbreaks. Other major threats are predation and habitat degradation by feral pigs and competition with invasive, non-native plants.

Phyllostegia hispida has been a candidate for listing under the ESA since 1997. The species was officially proposed for listing as endangered on February 19, 2008. Federal listing of *Phyllostegia hispida* automatically invokes state listing under Hawai'i's endangered species law.

Conservation measures have been taken and continue today to protect the species. A variety of organizations such as the University of Hawaii's Lyon Arboretum on O'ahu, the National Tropical Botanical Garden on Kaua'i, and Kalaupapa National Historical Park on Moloka'i are propagating plants that may be used for outplanting into suitable habitat. Land managers from Hawai'i's Department of Land and Natural Resources have fenced some plants to protect them from feral ungulates, and The Nature Conservancy continues to control feral pigs and alien plants within the Kamakou Preserve.

-more-

Critical habitat is not being proposed at this time, because the Service is unable to identify the physical and biological features essential to the conservation of *Phyllostegia hispida* and is therefore unable to identify areas that contain these features. Under the Endangered Species Act, the Service has one year after a species is listed to designate critical habitat.

Phyllostegia hispida is a nonaromatic member of the mint family (Lamiaceae). It is a loosely spreading, many-branched vine that forms large tangled masses, and is known only from the wet forests of eastern Molokai at elevations between 2,300 and 4,200 feet.

Copies of the final rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/> or www.regulations.gov. Copies are also available by calling the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office in Honolulu, Hawai'i at 808 792 9400.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.