



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# News Release

*Pacific Islands External Affairs Office*

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## Rare Moloka'i Plant Proposed for Federal Protection

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public comment on a proposed rule to list the plant species *Phyllostegia hispida* as endangered. The notice published in the *Federal Register* today seeks any information that may be available regarding the status of this species. *Phyllostegia hispida* is a very rare species – so rare it has no common name – and is found only in the wet forests of eastern Moloka'i in the Hawaiian Islands.

The public comment period will be open for 60 days allowing all interested parties time to consider the information provided in the proposed rule and submit comments. The Service welcomes all comments regarding the proposed rule but is especially interested in those pertaining to: biological, commercial trade, or other relevant data concerning any threats to this species; additional information concerning the range, distribution, and population size of this species, including the locations of any additional populations; current or planned activities in the areas occupied by the species and possible impacts of these activities on this species.

“We hope that the added protection the plant will receive from endangered species status will help bring it back from the brink of extinction,” said Patrick Leonard, field supervisor for the Fish and Wildlife Service’s Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office. “This first step should not only provide protections, but also increase the attention given to the species, possibly helping locate additional individuals in the wild and to continue and expand artificial propagation and outplanting efforts.”

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; competition with invasive, alien plants species; and possible predation by invertebrates such as slugs.

*Phyllostegia hispida* has been a candidate for listing under the ESA since 1997. Federal listing of *Phyllostegia hispida* automatically invokes state listing under Hawai'i’s endangered species law.

*Phyllostegia hispida* has rarely been seen in the wild. From 1910 to 1979, a total of eight occurrences were recorded. Since 1979, individual plants have been periodically discovered, but in subsequent years have died for various reasons.

In April 2007, 10 new wild plants were discovered within Pu‘u Ali‘i Natural Area Reserve, including one mature individual. Seeds were collected from the mature plant and sent to Lyon Arboretum, and cuttings were taken from some of the other plants for propagation.

In addition, 12 *Phyllostegia hispida* plants grown in captivity were outplanted within the natural area reserve in April. A check on the plants two months later found 11 healthy plants. In June 2007, another 12 individual plants were outplanted into an enclosure at The Nature Conservancy's Kamakou Preserve, bringing the total number of plants in the wild to 10 naturally occurring and 23 recently outplanted individuals.

Conservation measures have been taken and continue today to protect the species. Propagules from this species – that may be used for outplanting into suitable habitat – are currently maintained by 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.

Four of the plants recently discovered within the Pu'u Ali'i Natural Area Reserve are protected from feral pigs by a fenced enclosure, and there are no signs of feral ungulate activity in the vicinity of the other six plants. The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i continues to control feral pigs and alien plants within the Kamakou Preserve.

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 1 year after a species is placed on the threatened and endangered species list to propose 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.

The Service will consider comments from all interested parties received by April 21, 2008. Comments can be sent by one of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal* at <http://www.regulations.gov> . Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- Via U.S. mail or hand delivery to Public Comments Processing, Attn: RIN 1018-AV00; Division of Policy and Directives Management; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Suite 222, Arlington, VA 22203.

Copies of the proposed rule may be downloaded from the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov/pacificislands/>. For further information contact: Patrick Leonard, Field Supervisor, Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Box 50088, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96850; telephone 808 792 9400 or fax 808 792 9581.

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](http://www.fws.gov).