

## Obama Administration Lists Its First Endangered Species

**HONOLULU, Hawaii**, March 17, 2009 (ENS) - A Hawaiian native plant is the first species to be protected by the Obama administration under the Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today that it is listing *Phyllostegia hispida* from the island of Molokai as an endangered species. Just 238 plants of the species exist today.

Federal listing of *Phyllostegia hispida* automatically invokes state listing under Hawaii's endangered species law.

"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.

"We are heartened that this one extremely endangered Hawaiian plant will finally receive the protection it so badly needs to survive," said Noah Greenwald, biodiversity program director with the Center for Biological Diversity.

"We are hopeful the Obama administration will move swiftly to protect the other 251 candidates for protection, many of which are equally as endangered as this Hawaiian plant."

*Phyllostegia hispida* is a diffuse perennial vine of the mint family with many-branched stems that form large tangled masses. Found only in the wet forests of eastern Molokai, one group of plants grows in The Nature Conservancy's Kamakou Preserve and more are growing in the state's Pu'u Ali'i Natural Area Reserve.

*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.

In 2007, while patrolling the Molokai forest for invasive weeds, a field crew from the Nature Conservancy discovered the rare mint that was believed to have died out. "Seeing the natives coming back is the best part of the job," says crew member Wailana Moses. "That's when you know you're winning."

Since 2007, 24 wild plants have been discovered, and over 100 individuals produced from cuttings have been outplanted in the Kamakou Preserve.

The plant, which is known only by its scientific name, was first



**Phyllostegia hispida growing in The Nature Conservancy's Kamakou Preserve on Molokai. (Photo by Grady Timmons courtesy [Nature Conservancy Hawaii](#))**

designated as a candidate for protection in 1997. The Service had considered listing the species on an emergency basis, but that move was delayed by the Bush administration.

In November 2005, the Center for Biological Diversity and other conservation groups sued the Bush administration for using the candidate list as a stall tactic to prevent species from being placed on the endangered list. On average, the 251 candidate species have been waiting for protection for over 20 years. Such delays have real consequences, with at least 24 species having gone extinct after being designated candidates for protection. The goal of the lawsuit is to obtain firm deadlines for listing the 251 species within three years.

"Listing of one of the candidates this early in the Obama administration is an encouraging sign for endangered species," said Greenwald. "The Endangered Species Act can save these 251 species, but only if they are granted protection."

Also today, the Service's Pacific Islands Office announced it is initiating five-year reviews of 103 species from Hawaii that are already protected under the Endangered Species Act.

The species to be reviewed include 56 plants, one bat, five birds and 41 tree snails.

The Service is opening a 60-day public comment period for the submission of scientific and commercial information relevant to their listing status under the Act. The public, government agencies, tribes, industry and the scientific and conservation communities are asked to submit information by May 15, 2009.

Periodic status reviews of all listed species are required by the Act at least once every five years to determine whether a species' classification as threatened or endangered is still appropriate.

If the best scientific and commercial data produced since the time of listing are not consistent with the current classification of any species, the Service will recommend a change in the species' federal classification.

A species could be recommended for reclassification from endangered to threatened (downlisting), from threatened to endangered (uplisting), or for removal from the federal list of threatened and endangered species (delisting).

Any recommended change in classification would be subject to a separate rule-making process that includes further opportunities for public review and comment. If no change in classification is recommended, the species would retain its current listing status.

Information that is considered in a status review population trends, distribution, abundance, demographics and genetics, conservation measures that have been implemented to benefit the species, threat status and trends.