



**Hawaiian
Electric**

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hawaiian Electric grant to Ka ‘Ahahui ‘o Ka Nāhelehele helps sustain ‘ōhi‘a *Initiative collects and preserves ‘ōhi‘a seeds*

KAMUELA, HI, Jan. 20, 2020 – The nonprofit Ka ‘Ahahui ‘o Ka Nāhelehele, which works to protect Hawai‘i’s dryland forests, has received a \$27,500 grant from Hawaiian Electric for its Rapid ‘Ōhi‘a Death Seed Banking Initiative, an effort to preserve seeds from the native ‘ōhi‘a tree for future forest reforestation.

‘Ōhi‘a are a species of flowering evergreen in the myrtle family that are endemic to Hawai‘i. The trees, which help sustain the island’s biodiversity, have declined by the hundreds of thousands on Hawai‘i Island due to a fungal disease called rapid ‘ōhi‘a death that has no known treatment. The disease also has been found on O‘ahu, Maui, and Kaua‘i.

“This is a wonderful blessing for the Hawaii Island Seed Bank and for ‘ōhi‘a trees, which are the foundation of Hawai‘i’s forests,” said Jill Wagner, program director. “We are very grateful Hawaiian Electric understands that saving ‘ōhi‘a seeds is the most positive thing we can do to guarantee the future of this native keystone species. Seed saving is important, and this partnership will allow us to greatly expand our ‘ōhi‘a seed collection efforts.”

Rapid ‘ōhi‘a death has already killed more than 135,000 acres of ‘ōhi‘a forest on Hawai‘i Island. Wagner said research has shown the fungus is not found in the seeds, which means they can be collected and stored for future planting. The Hawaii Island Seed Bank, located in an off-grid facility in Kona, is the major collector of ‘ōhi‘a seeds in the state and the only established seed bank for Hawai‘i Island’s ‘ōhi‘a seed collection.

Wagner said the Hawaiian Electric grant would be used to collect seeds from about 100 trees located in 11 identified seed zones to represent the diversity of ‘ōhi‘a at various sites where they have adapted to climate, soil conditions, and elevations.

“The potential for rapid ‘ōhi‘a death to spread statewide underscores the urgency of the work by conservationists to save ‘ōhi‘a seeds for the future,” said Sharon Suzuki, president of Hawaiian Electric’s Maui County and Hawai‘i Island utilities, upon presenting the grant. “Helping to protect a species that holds cultural and environmental significance is important to us as a company that is focused on sustainability and stewardship of our natural resources.”

-more-

Suzuki said part of the funding would be used to support education about the 'ōhi'a tree in Hawai'i watersheds, and training for volunteers to assist with collecting seeds. Ka 'Ahahui 'o Ka Nāhelehele is working with Hawaiian Electric to develop a program for its employees to volunteer with the project and collect seeds in Hawai'i Island forests.

To donate to the program or learn more about Ka 'Ahahui 'o Ka Nāhelehele, visit drylandforest.org.

###



FOLLOW US FOR THE LATEST:

