



THE 'ŌHIŌA CHALLENGE: CALLING NEW SOLVERS TO SAVE HAWAII'S FORESTS

\$70,000 Challenge Launches Today – Application Period Open Until February 1, 2019

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, September 5, 2018 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Hawai'i's iconic 'Ōhi'a tree faces a new and undetectable threat that is killing off trees at an unprecedented rate. This disease threatens to decimate this species that is critical to the unique culture and habitat of Hawai'i. [Conservation X Labs](#), a DC-based technology start-up, announces the launch of [The 'Ōhi'a Challenge](#)—a competition for solutions to this threat. In partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior offices and agencies, Conservation X Labs today announced the opportunity to compete and seeks new solvers from unconventional fields such as engineering, fluidics, optics, microbiology, hackers, makers, and many more to save Hawai'i's forests from extinction.

The 'Ōhi'a Challenge offers \$70,000 for solutions that can rapidly detect and prevent the spread of Rapid 'Ōhi'a Death (ROD). ROD is caused by fungal pathogens that have recently decimated the endemic ohia tree population on the islands of Kaua'i and Hawai'i. Applications for solutions will be accepted from September 5th, 2018 through February 1st, 2019 on <https://www.challenge.gov/list/>.

Conservation X Labs has partnered with Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Native Hawaiian Relations, Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge, and National Invasive Species Council (NISC) Secretariat to launch The 'Ōhi'a Challenge as part of a collective effort to address ROD by harnessing emerging science, technological innovations, and the ingenuity of people around the world.

The 'Ōhi'a tree carries immense cultural heritage and natural value in the Hawaiian islands. A Hawaiian legend tells of the love and separation of the young couple 'Ōhi'a and Lehua: jealous of their love, the goddess Pele turned the warrior 'Ōhi'a into a tree and Lehua into the tree's flower. If you pluck the red lehua blossoms of the 'Ōhi'a tree (*Metrosideros polymorpha*), legend says the lovers' tears fill the sky with rain as they are separated again.

Promising solutions will receive further support on Conservation X Labs' [Digital Makerspace](#), a platform where science, entrepreneurship, and technology communities come together to co-create tech-enabled solutions to conservation problems. Anyone can submit a solution to identify infected trees early before they die, minimize the spread of ROD, and eliminate the pathogens and leverage the community of solvers to develop ideas.

The 'Ōhi'a Challenge team is calling on the technology, engineering, and scientific community to help solve the problem. "Our goal is to use the best of human ingenuity to identify technological solutions that can save part of Hawai'i's beauty. This is why we look to engage innovative thinkers within other advanced technology fields through this challenge prize", said Dr. Alex Dehgan, CEO of Conservation X Labs, "We don't have to accept 'Ōhi'a's extinction."

Microscopic invasive fungi, *Ceratocystis huliohia* and *Ceratocystis lukuohia*, are responsible for ROD. Since 2014 when first identified, the fungi have infected thousands of acres of forest and have recently invaded the islands of Kaua'i and Hawai'i. If unstoppable, ROD could irreversibly change Hawai'i's ecosystems and culture by eliminating the beloved ohia.

To join the coalition to save the ohia and protect Hawai'i's natural heritage, visit www.SavetheOhia.org for complete information about the Challenge rules and instructions on how to submit an application. All press and general inquiries can be directed to ohia@conservationxlabs.org or Senior Program Manager, Chad Gallinat (chad@conservationxlabs.org).

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