



**Talking points regarding the threat of bauxite mining in Cockpit Country, Jamaica
Compiled by the Jamaica Environment Trust and Windsor Research Centre
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Background

Bauxite is the ore from which aluminum is made. It is found below the surface of Jamaica's red dirt in certain areas and has been mined in the 1950s. To facilitate the mining, people are displaced from their communities, and forests and farmland are destroyed. Required rehabilitation has often not been done, and even when done, can never restore the land to its original function.

Two new entrants into the aluminum industry in Jamaica, New Day Aluminum, LLC and Jiuquan Iron and Steel Group (JISCO), have been promised bauxite by the Jamaican Government. It has not yet been confirmed where the bauxite will come from, but it is known that there are extensive reserves in Cockpit Country.

Boundary

Settling a boundary for Cockpit Country has been extremely protracted and has been underway in one form or another since 2007. At least seven boundaries were proposed by various stakeholders at various times, including the Cockpit Country Stakeholders Group (CCSG), the Maroons, National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), and the University of the West Indies (UWI). Some boundaries focused on geology and morphology (Sweeting Boundary) and how human settlements developed in response to the landscape (Ring Road) but only the CCSG boundary recognized the full suite of cultural (Maroon) and natural features which define this globally unique landscape.

The Government of Jamaica commissioned UWI to carry out public consultation on a Cockpit Country boundary and this was completed in September 2013. It can be found online at

http://nepa.gov.jm/new/services_products/publications/Cockpit_Country_Boundary_Consultation_Report_2013.pdf

18 community meetings were held in Cockpit Country and three larger town hall meetings in Kingston, Santa Cruz and Montego Bay.

The main finding was that the people of Cockpit Country wanted it declared a protected area, ecotourism site, national park and World Heritage Site. There was "vehement"

opposition to bauxite mining and limestone quarrying in Cockpit Country. There was “full agreement” that the defined boundary should ensure watershed protection and protection of the natural resources and ecosystems.

Recommendations included urgent legal protection for Cockpit Country, with Core, Transition and Outer Boundaries to be settled, and a Stakeholders Oversight Committee to be formed.

Since 2013, the matter has continued to be discussed by the various state agencies and it is believed that various boundaries have been put forward, but so far there has been failure to reach agreement.

The boundary proposed by the CCSG is the only boundary that adequately captures the true and total definition of Cockpit Country: unique geology, biology, ecological connectivity, and Jamaican history and culture.

Water resources

Cockpit Country holds critical water resources for Jamaica, estimated variously at 40% of the water needs of the western end of the land, and 40% of all Jamaica’s underground water resources. The water is held in a limestone aquifer (underground water), sometimes at great depth, is generally of extremely high quality, and is connected by little understood, complex and seasonally variable subterranean channels. It is replenished by the heavy rainfall of Cockpit Country, first via the penetration of tree roots into the rocks and soils, then through water-retaining bauxitic soils, which filter the water as it slowly drains downwards, and eventually working its way through caves, faults, fissures and sinkholes to fill the aquifer. A list of all the rivers, streams, upwellings, springs, ponds and glades runs to 32. The main rivers are Great River, Martha Brae, Black River and Rio Bueno in the east (arising in Litchfield Mountain/Matheson’s Run).

Biological Diversity

Cockpit Country holds extraordinary biological diversity in its forests, plants, soils and animals. It contains high levels of endemism (found in Jamaica and nowhere else), and many, especially a multitude of plants, are found in only Cockpit Country and nowhere else in Jamaica.

Ecosystem Services – services provided by nature to human beings for free

- Clean air
- Cooler air (via evapotranspiration)
- Carbon sequestration
- Water cycling, filtration, storage
- Pollination, pest control (important for agriculture)
- Enriched soil for agriculture (food security)
- Medicinal plants
- Climate resilience

History

Cockpit Country is not just a critical natural resource – it is an important cultural, historical and symbolic site for Jamaicans. It is a symbol of safety, resistance and triumph. The Cockpit Country boundary must also take into consideration the region's cultural and historical features. For example, some boundary definitions do not consider Accompong to be integral to Cockpit Country. By not including history and culture in the definition of boundaries, Accompong, the centre of the Leeward Maroons, a people deeply imbedded in Cockpit Country and self-defined as the second native people of Cockpit Country (the first being the Taino) are thereby erased, losing both the integral relationship of the Maroons to Cockpit Country and an essential part of Jamaican heritage. In addition, some of the earliest post-emancipation Free Villages were founded in Cockpit Country.

Climate Change

Warming temperatures caused by global climate change are projected to bring to Jamaica lower rainfall (possibly as much as a 40% reduction by mid-century), more frequent and longer droughts, more intense rainfall (leading to flooding), more intense storms (a range of devastating impacts), and sea level rise. Ensuring climate resilience requires the urgent and committed protection of natural resources (like Cockpit Country) that reduce the impacts of these eventualities.

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