



For Immediate Release

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Kingston, Jamaica

Long awaited but still leaves out important areas: JET acknowledges the recent announcement for the declaration of the Cockpit Country Protected Area

The Jamaica Environment Trust (JET) acknowledges the recent announcement by the Prime Minister to legally declare Cockpit Country a protected area and closed to prospecting and mining as progress. It is a long overdue step to the protection of the area which comes after many years of advocacy by several groups and individuals, but important areas in the northeast and south have been omitted.

Cockpit Country is a unique landscape in Central Jamaica which spans the parishes of St. Ann, St. James, Trelawny, Manchester and St. Elizabeth with the majority of the forests being in Trelawny. It is a biodiversity hotspot with a high rate of plant and animal endemism and important for its geological and cultural heritage. It also the source of six major rivers and supplies 40% of Jamaica's freshwater.

Efforts to protect Cockpit Country began in the 1950s, continued in the late 1990s and ramped up further starting in 2006, when it became clear that prospecting licenses for bauxite had been granted for a large part of Cockpit Country. After many years of advocacy and at least seven proposed boundaries, the Prime Minister finally announced the Cockpit Country Protected Area (CCPA) on March 17, 2022.

The gazetted Cockpit Country Protected Area (CCPA) is 78,024 hectares, while the Cockpit County Stakeholder Group (CCSG) Boundary, widely accepted by most stakeholders as the most correct boundary is 116, 218 hectares. The newly declared CCPA is approximately 32% smaller and excludes important areas, many of which are being considered for Special Exclusive Prospective Licenses (SEPL) and includes those areas in the northeast that have been recently released for mining.

JET remains concerned, however, that there is still no buffer zone around the protected area which means mining, quarrying or prospecting would be allowed right up to the boundary. We are particularly concerned about potential impacts to the Rio Bueno watershed and its rural communities, including Jackland, Richmond Pen (along with their Water Catchment), Barnstaple, Broadleaf and Bryan Castle.

It is not yet clear who will be managing the protected area and we look forward to learning more about this. We seek clarification as to whether quarrying will also be prohibited in the CCPA.

Finally, the Draft Overarching Policy for the entire Protected Areas System, 2016 and the Policy for the National System of Protected Areas, 1997 proposes a participatory approach for the establishment and management of national protected areas. Both documents describe the need for the public to be integrated into all levels of a transparent, open and inclusive process. We therefore hope that all stakeholders, especially local community groups, will be appropriately engaged with regards to the management of the area.

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