



Northern Jamaica Conservation Association

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2 November 2006

Mr. James Rawle
Chairman, Natural Resources Conservation Authority
c/o NEPA, 10 Caledonia Avenue, Kingston 5

Dear Mr. Rawle,

I write on behalf of our Board and Members to express NJCA's alarm at the possibility that the Government of Jamaica would consider allowing prospecting or any type of mining in the Cockpit Country, or along its scenic inhabited edges which have a huge potential for eco-cultural tourism. We understand that lands adjacent to the historic village of Stewart Town, Trelawny, rich in architectural heritage and an important birdwatching area, as well as the scenic Dornoch Head spring, fall in the area currently under consideration for mining.

The Cockpit Country is Jamaica's only true wilderness and a globally significant reservoir of biodiversity and cultural heritage. To open up the Cockpit Country to mining exploration would seem to signify an intention to allow mining, should bauxite reserves be found (which is highly likely given the well-known geology of the area). I quote from a recent statement by Professor Michael J. Day, Chair, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, an expert on the geomorphology of the White Limestone areas of Jamaica:

“The Cockpit Country is the international type-example of cockpit karst landscape, and is recognized world-wide as a unique and invaluable natural heritage. In addition to its iconic landscape status, it has great biological significance and plays a critical role in maintaining regional groundwater supplies and river discharges. It is probably the only near-pristine karst system remaining in the Caribbean. Additionally, the Cockpit Country has historical and cultural value as a hearth of resistance to colonial occupation.

Bauxite mining in the Cockpit Country will irretrievably modify the morphology of the landscape and disrupt the karst hydrological cycle, resulting in long-term desertification interspersed with surface flooding. Geomorphic processes will be disrupted and the regional ecology destroyed. There will be an inevitable increase in contamination of water resources, and the ecotourism potential of the area will be lost forever. Moreover, Jamaica will lose its only real opportunity to have an internationally acclaimed UN Natural World Heritage Site.”¹

Furthermore, NJCA wishes to state our concern about reports of atrocious social and environmental practices of the company that has applied for a Special Exclusive Prospecting Licence for the Cockpit Country, namely ALCOA. We refer you to the websites of the following organisations that have been tracking the activities of Alcoa in some of its international operations:

Saving Iceland www.savingiceland.org

No Smelter TnT <http://www.nosmeltertnt.com/index.html>

Western Australian Forest Alliance <http://www.wafa.org.au/articles/alcoa/index.html>

¹ Professor Michael J. Day in a statement to the Cockpit Country Stakeholders Group, via Windsor Research Centre.

The Cockpit Country is internationally renowned for its high rates of endemism in flora and fauna. It is currently the subject of a major botanical study by the Fairchild Tropical Garden and the National Geographic Society. According to scientists leading this study,

“[This] remote area ...is the source of 40 percent of the water in Jamaica. Its tapestry of plants includes more than 1,000 species within 500 square miles. The entire Florida Peninsula – at 66,000 square miles – holds only about 4,000.”²

And in John Maxwell’s more poetic language,

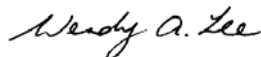
“[The Land of Look Behind] is a place of wild unearthly shrieks, strange subterranean rumbles and the most numbing silences. It is a place of purple, blue and pink rock, of rugged tortured peaks and the most placid, green and peaceful pasture at the bottom of a precipice miles below you, it seems; a place of echoes and of ghosts, of valiant struggle, of lying and treachery and death. It is a place where you might come upon a plant or animal previously unknown to science or a prehistoric rock carving. It is magic.”³

We would like to think that the Government of Jamaica, which has signed and ratified the UN Convention on Biodiversity, recognises the priceless and irreplaceable natural value of the Cockpit Country, as well as its cultural significance to our people, especially the indigenous Maroon population living there.

We would like to know that the preservation of the Cockpit Country, and its sustainable utilisation for ecotourism, scientific study, and carefully controlled harvesting of natural products for nutritional and medicinal purposes (ensuring equitable distribution of intellectual property rights derived from such products) will take precedence over the “very important and long-standing relationship between Jamaica and Alcoa.”⁴

NJCA joins many other groups and individuals in urging the NRCA, NEPA and the Ministry of Local Government and Environment to say NO to prospecting or mining in the Cockpit Country and environs.

Yours truly,



Wendy A. Lee
Executive Director, NJCA

² ‘Rare finds: Expedition uncovers Caribbean plants,’ by Georgia Tasker, Miami Herald article published October 18, 2006. URL: http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/email/news/breaking_news/15791118.htm

³ ‘The Land of Look Behind,’ by John Maxwell, Jamaica Observer, Sunday, October 01, 2006. http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/columns/html/20060930T210000-0500_113474_OBS_THE_LAND_OF_LOOK_BEHIND_.asp

⁴ Press Release from Jamaica House, quoted in the Observer, October 26, 2006. http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/html/20061026T190000-0500_114539_OBS_I_M_SORRY_PM_TELLS_EUROPE_.asp