



**Statement by the Most Honourable Andrew Holness, Prime Minister to
Parliament**

on the

**Delimitation of the Boundary of the Cockpit Country and the Cockpit
Country Protected Area**

on

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

Mr. Speaker, for several years, the public has been actively engaged in a robust, constructive discourse on the delimitation of the boundary of the Cockpit Country. Discussions have been ongoing for decades; transcending administrations but Mr. Speaker, the wait is over, today; after extensive consultations and deliberations we are announcing the areas to be designated as the boundary of the Cockpit Country and of the Cockpit Country Protected Area.

Mr. Speaker, let me **start by defining what the Cockpit Country** is and why it is so important? The Cockpit Country is a unique geological feature. The Encyclopaedia of Jamaican Heritage' describes it '*... as steep sided valleys that alternate with conical hillocks to form a peculiar type of terrain known as karst topography. The limestone cannot retain surface water and rain water immediately percolates below ground through cracks and fissures, widening these over millions of years until the pits or valleys are formed. The conical shape of the hills comes from the effect of weathering...*'. Mr. Speaker, as we look at a picture of the Cockpit Country, **Slide showing Picture of the Cockpit Country**); we will notice the characteristic "upside down egg tray carton appearance". I am also showing a picture of other karst formation in Jamaica - **Slide Showing Picture of Other Karst Formation (St. Ann – South of Claremont)**

Mr. Speaker, the Cockpit Country is recognized nationally and internationally for its:

- (i) **lush forests**, indeed, I have been advised by the Forestry Department that the Cockpit Country contains 41% of the remaining 7.7% of the island's closed broadleaf or primary forests, that is, 33,418.9 hectares, which play a critical role in the country's ability to adapt to and mitigate against the effects of climate change.

- (ii) **rich biodiversity**, it is the habitat for many endemic species of flora and fauna, for example the Giant Swallowtail butterfly (*Pterourus homerus*), the largest Swallowtail butterfly in the western hemisphere, and the yellow snake;
- (iii) **fresh water resources**, it is the source of 40% of western Jamaica's exploitable underground water resources; and
- (iv) great **historical and cultural significance**

Mr. Speaker, the Cockpit Country has attracted the interests of the Government, academic researchers, environmentalists, community-based organizations and potential investors. Each group of stakeholders has developed comparable, opposing and complementary perspectives. However, there is agreement among stakeholders that the Cockpit Country urgently needs to be managed to ensure its sustainability for generations to come. Mr. Speaker, the Government of Jamaica started taking steps to protect the Cockpit Country by first declaring the Cockpit Country Forest Reserve almost seven decades ago. Mr. Speaker, we have not done enough since that and we cannot afford to wait any longer.

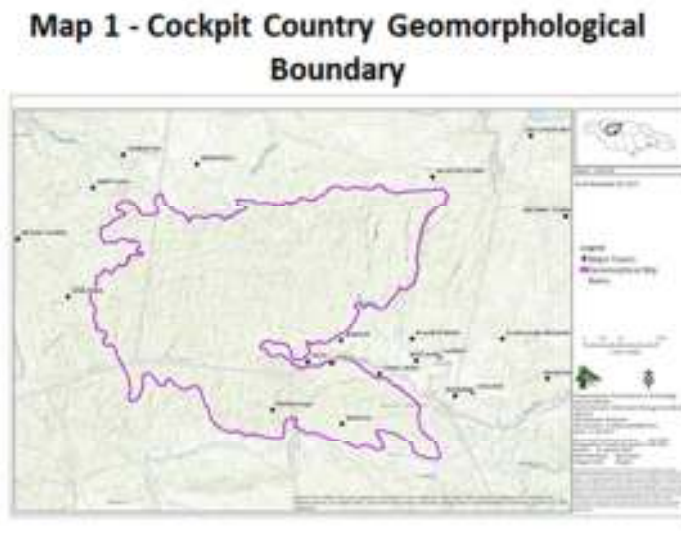
Mr. Speaker, the goal of defining the boundary is to ensure forest conservation, protection of biodiversity, preservation and improvement of traditional livelihoods and the creation of new economic opportunities from heritage, health and wellness tourism and eco-tourism.

Mr. Speaker, many boundaries have been proposed over the years and each has its own criteria upon which it was defined. While we acknowledge that we may not have consensus about the ideal boundary for the Cockpit Country; we call on all stakeholders to view the Government's decision on the delimitation of the Cockpit Country as well as the area to be protected in a spirit of partnership.

Mr. Speaker, **in deliberations on the boundary of the Cockpit Country; we first sought to establish the scientific basis for defining the area.** As such, we relied on the work of researchers who would have defined the contiguous, karstic geomorphology of the area; which gives the unique conical hillocks and valleys (*the upside down egg tray appearance*). The University of the West Indies (Mona), under the leadership of Professor Dale Webber, was engaged some years ago to undertake stakeholder consultations on the boundary of the Cockpit Country and make recommendations, accordingly. In its 2013 report, the University recommended that the Cockpit Country comprise three zones, that is, (i) a core which is represented by the contiguous karstic geomorphology of the area; represented by the boundary described by Parris Lyew-Ayee, Jr 2005 report, (ii) a transition zone, commonly referred to as the National Ecological Gap Assessment Report (NEGAR) Cockpit Add-on Boundary, and (iii) an outer boundary or Cockpit Stakeholders' Group Boundary.

Mr. Speaker, **the Parris Lyew-Ayee Jr. (2005) boundary is being recognized by the Cabinet as the boundary of the Cockpit Country** by the State and is depicted on **Map 1**. This boundary will be declared and gazetted.

Slide Map 1 – Boundary of the Cockpit Country (geomorphological boundary)



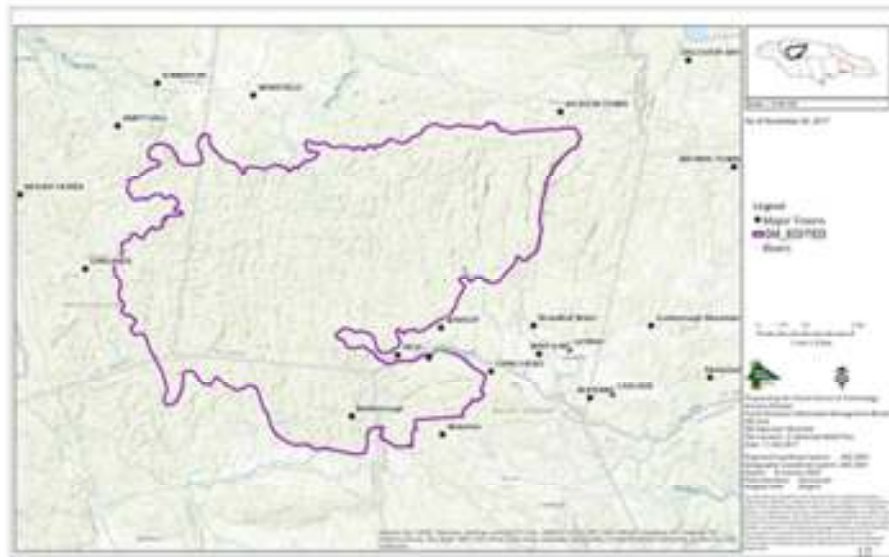
Mr. Speaker, while we accepted the sound basis on which this area is defined, however, in looking at the current land use, (see **Slide Map 2 – Land Use - BELOW**) we noted that the area in the vicinity of Manchester North-eastern, between Craighead in the north and Christiana in the south is severely degraded. It is sitting on degraded karst with mainly fields, degraded forest (secondary forest/ruinate), has large settlements and commercial activity. Therefore, Mr. Speaker; we are defining the section of the geomorphological boundary that excludes the above-mentioned area as the “Core Cockpit”. **This is depicted on Map 3 (BELOW).**

Map 2. Cockpit Country Land Use (2013)



Slide Map 3 – Core Cockpit Country

Map 3 - Core Cockpit Country



Mr. Speaker, let me hasten to add that there are other factors that should be taken into account in defining the areas to be protected. Mr. Speaker, we definitely took these factors into account. The Cabinet therefore in determining the boundary took into account:

- the closed broadleaf forest cover/primary forest
- the rich biodiversity
- the hydrology
- important historical, cultural sites

Mr. Speaker, therefore the area to be protected will include existing forest reserves, significant hydrological and ecological features and cultural and heritage sites. **This area comprises approximately 74,726 hectares and will be referred to as the Cockpit Country Protected Area and will be protected under specific legislation as advised by the Attorney General.**

Slide Map 4a – CCPA Map; Map 4b – CCPA and heritage sites

Map 4a. Cockpit Country Protected Area
(showing constituency boundaries)



Map 4b. Cockpit Country Protected Area
with Hydrological features (caves)



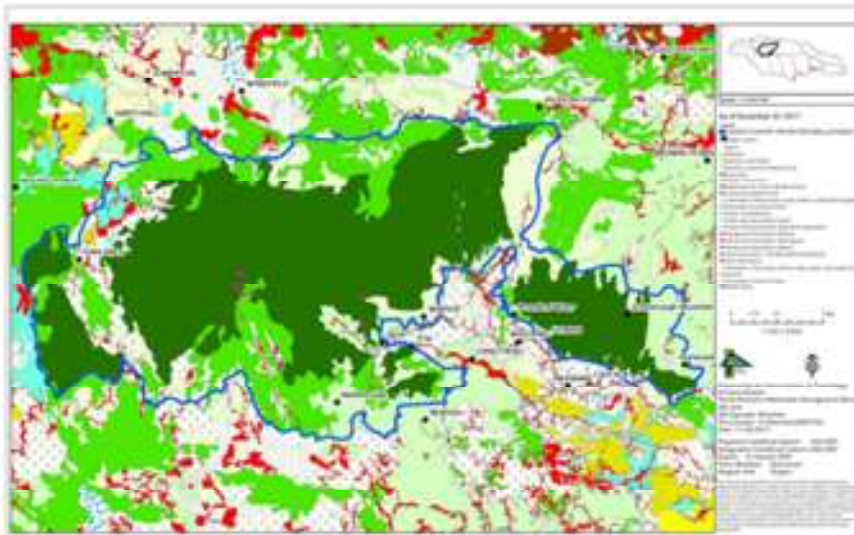
Mr. Speaker, let me look at each in some detail:

In relation to the **hydrological resources**, the Water Resources Authority identified and advised the Cabinet on hydrological features within the environs

of the Cockpit Country which required protection. In this regard, caves in the north-east, in the Rio Bueno watershed, and in the north-west have been included in the area to be protected.

Mr. Speaker, with regards to the **forested areas**, the Cabinet has decided to extend the existing Cockpit Country, Litchfield-Matheson's Run and the Fyffe and Rankine Forest Reserves to take in the broadleaf forests which are in close proximity to these areas. These forested areas are depicted on the 2013 Land Use Map. (**see Slide Map 5 – CCPA and Land Use**).

Map 5 - Cockpit Country Protected Area with Landuse (2013)

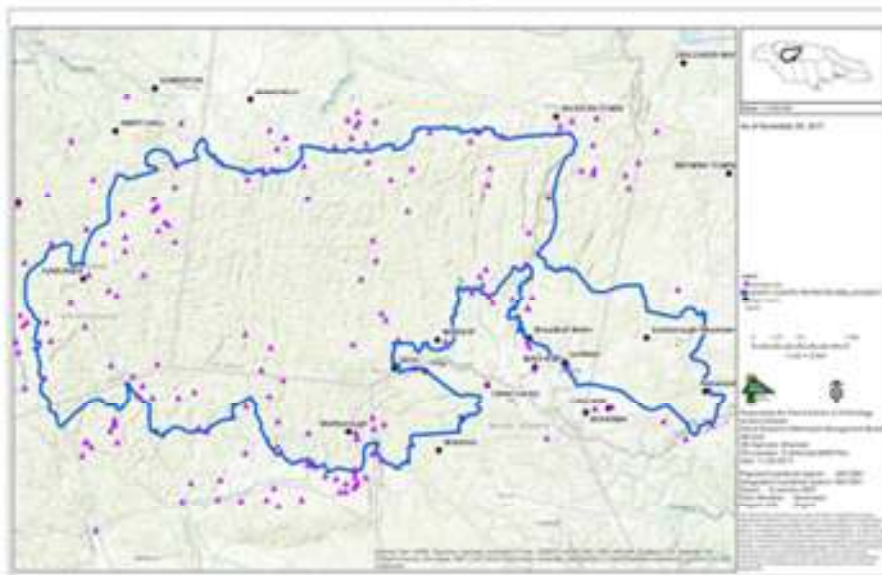


Protection of these forests play an important role in the country's climate change mitigation strategy by serving as a sink for greenhouse gases and will inform the country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as well as assist the country in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which reference climate change, life on land, clean water and sanitation.

In relation to the **historical and cultural sites** within the area, the Ministry with responsibility for culture and the Jamaica National Heritage Trust have advised that sufficient safeguards exist under the Jamaica National Heritage Trust Act to protect the cultural and historical sites and artefacts in the area.

(See Slide Map 6 – Historical and Cultural Sites).

**Map 6 - Cockpit Country Protected Area
and Heritage sites**



Mr. Speaker, we have gone further to request the portfolio Ministry with responsibility for culture to fast track the identification of other important cultural/historical sites and artefacts in the area with a view to protecting them under the law. In addition, the Ministry has been asked to seek the nomination of the Cockpit Country Protected Area as a World Heritage site under UNESCO.

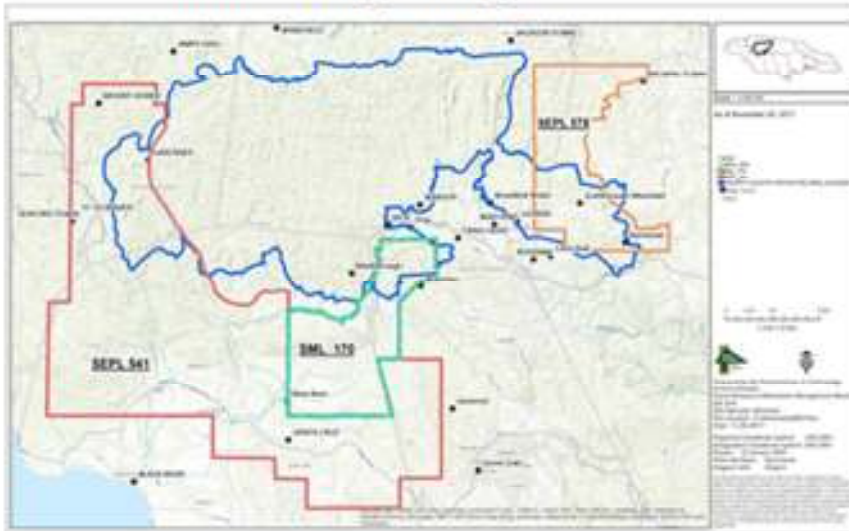
Mr. Speaker, we are therefore protecting the “Core Cockpit” i.e. the areas that have not been degraded and occupied by irreversible human activities as well as the forests flora and fauna that subsists on the core and contiguous or surround the

Mr. Speaker, to ensure the effective management of the Cockpit Country Protected Area and in recognition of the rights of private landowners, the Government intends to continue to partner with private landowners, local groups and other stakeholders, including the Accompong Maroons, in the development of a **comprehensive management plan** for the area. Implementation of this Plan will require dedicated resources from the national budget as well as donor support. This Management Plan will be subject to Cabinet approval; following which it will be tabled in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to encourage private landowners with forest, within the environs of the Cockpit Country to take advantage of the incentive of remission of property tax, provided in the Forest Act by declaring these forested lands as forest reserves or forest management areas.

Mr. Speaker, one of the major points of discussion over the Cockpit Country has been the issue of mining. Mr. Speaker, the Government is declaring that **no mining will be permitted in the Cockpit Country Protected Area**. In this regard, the Mining Act and any existing mining licences will be amended to close these areas to mining. The Government is of the view that this area is too valuable in terms of its ecological and hydrological importance and uniqueness to allow mining which may result in permanent and irreversible harm and deprive future generations of the benefit of this national asset. Mr. Speaker, while we will forgo the exploitation of millions of tonnes of high grade bauxite and limestone with potential earnings of billions of United States dollars; we cannot put a price tag on the loss to our water resources and biodiversity. **(See Slide Map 7 – Existing Mining Licences)**

Map 7 - Cockpit Country Protected Area with Existing Mining Licences



Mr. Speaker, please note that a detailed description of the boundary of the **Cockpit Country** and the **Cockpit Country Protected Area** as recognized by the State will be provided by the Forestry Department after consultations with the relevant public sector agencies and the necessary 'ground truthing' (a term used in various fields to refer to information provided by direct observation (i.e. empirical evidence) as opposed to information provided by inference. has been undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot also deny that there are substantial mineral deposits located outside the declared boundary of the Cockpit Country which are exploitable. However, the Cabinet mandated that major development activities within the environs of the Cockpit Country will be subject to a rigorous process of decision-making including approval by Cabinet; taking into account the provisions of the relevant legislation, including the Jamaica National Heritage Trust Act, the he Water Resources Act, the Forest Act, the Natural Resources

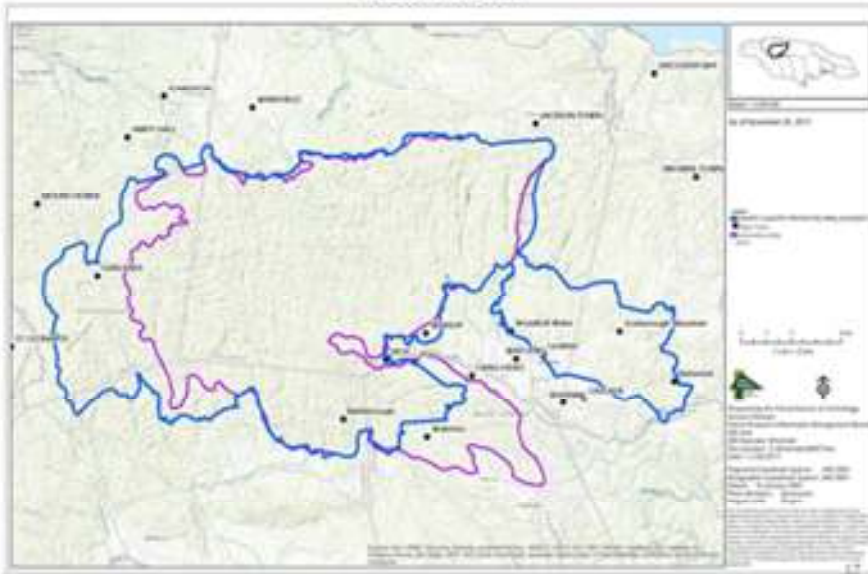
Conservation Authority Act, the Wildlife Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act and the Mining Act, prior to any decision being made. In addition, the relevant public authorities have been mandated to increase their enforcement activities within the Cockpit Country Protected Area and its environs to minimize, and ultimately eliminate, those activities that may pose a threat to the natural resources within the area, including charcoal and yam stick production, open burning, introduction of non-native species, disruption of cave ecosystems, hunting, poaching, and over-collecting of specific species. Mr. Speaker, while we will have designated protected areas; the relevant public sector agencies, including the Natural Resources Conservation Authority, as per their respective legal mandates are required to protect and conserve the natural resources within the country's jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, the extension services of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries have been asked to work with subsistence farmers in the Cockpit Country and its environs to ensure that best farming practices are applied in order to minimize any adverse impacts on this ecologically and hydrologically sensitive area.

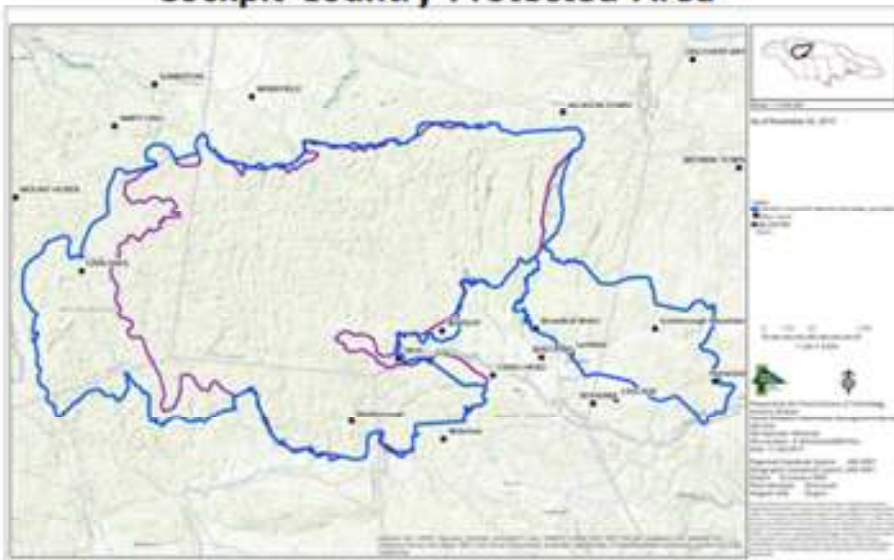
The delimitation of the boundary of the Cockpit Country has long been awaited. I would like to thank every single person who contributed to the discussions. I note the interest and vigilance in ensuring that this matter is finalized. In arriving at this decision, the Government has shown its commitment to preserve this unique national treasure for the benefit of present and future generations of Jamaicans and visitors alike.

[Slides 17 and 18 – Map 8 – Boundaries of Cockpit Country and CCPA; Map 9 – Core Cockpit Country and CCPA]

Map 8. Boundaries of Cockpit Country and CCPA



Map 9. Core Cockpit Country and Cockpit Country Protected Area



Mr. Speaker, we believe that the boundary of the Cockpit Country, as I have announced today, is the one that best embraces and reflects the unique characteristics of the area. Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that there may be differing views; however, in a true spirit of partnership to ensure that our current

actions secure the future for the generations to come; we look forward to the renewed sense of responsibility and continued active participation in the sustainability of Jamaica, land we love.