

Country Report for Jamaica, regarding the current status of bamboo resources and utility in Jamaica

Geography

Jamaica is an island in the Caribbean Sea and is located 90 miles south of Cuba. It's Geographic coordinates are 18 15 N , 77 30 W.



It's total area is 10,991 km² with land being 10,831 km² and water accounting for 160 km². The island has a coastline totaling 1,022 km with territorial sea stretching out to 12 NM and exclusive economic zone of 200 NM. Jamaica's climate is tropical and is generally hot and humid, but has a more temperate interior. The terrain is mostly mountainous, with narrow discontinuous coastal plain. The lowest point is at Sea level while it's highest is the blue mountain peak at 2,256m. The major natural resources are Bauxite, Gypsum and Limestone. 16.07% of the land is considered arable land with permanent crops occupying 10.16%.

Jamaica falls within the Hurricane Belt and is susceptible to Hurricanes especially between July and November. The island is strategically located between Cayman Trench

and Jamaica Channel, the main sea lane for the Panama Canal. It has the World's 7th largest natural harbour and has such as become an important transshipment point.

The Jamaican People

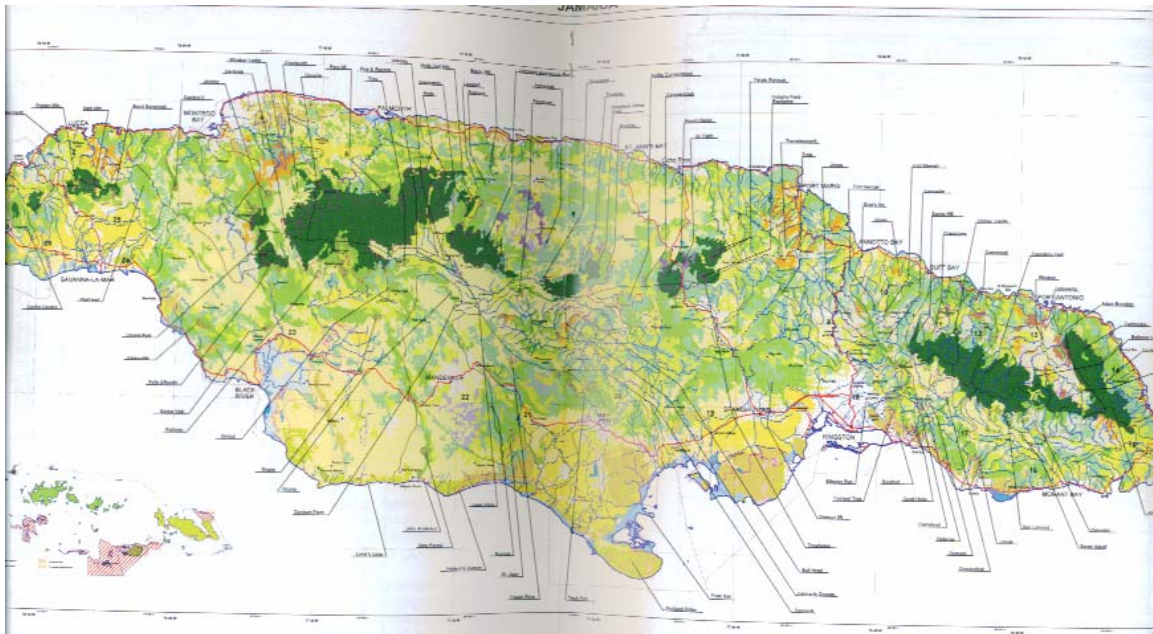
The population stands at 2,731,832 (2005) with a median age of 27.25 years and a population growth rate of 0.71%. The life expectancy at birth is 76.29 years with that for males being 74.23 and female being 78.45 years. Jamaica is made up of a number of ethnic groups, blacks being the predominant group accounting for 90.9% of the population. The rest of the population comprises of 1.3% East Indians, 0.2% whites, 0.2% Chinese, 7.3% mixed and other being 0.1%. Jamaica is considered a christian country and is made up of a number of religious groups. Protestant churches (Baptist, Anglican, Seventh Day Adventist etc.) account for 61.3% of the population, Roman Catholic 4% and others including some spiritual cults 34.7%. The official language is English but Patois is also spoken.

Government

The Jamaican model of Government is Constitutional Parliamentary Democracy. The country is made up of 14 administrative divisions called parishes (similar to provinces). The country got its independence from Britain on August 6, 1962 and is now part of British Commonwealth. The Legal System is based on English Common Law.

Forest Cover and Land Use

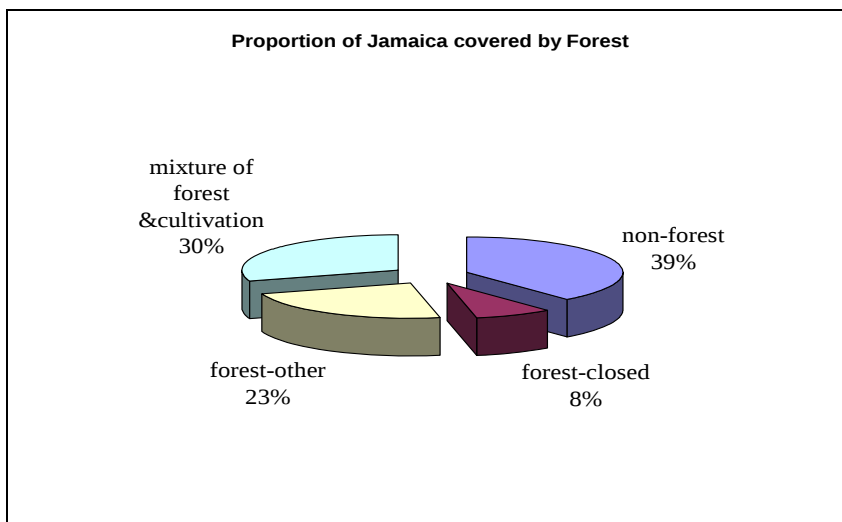
Below is a 1998 Land Use/Cover Map prepared by the Forestry Department. It shows regular Base Map features, Forest land use/cover (>75%), Mixed land use/cover (>50% and > 25%) and Non-forest land use/cover.



LEGEND

(Forest cover >75 %)		Mixed cover >50% ,>25%	
	Closed broadleaved forest		Disturbed Broadleaved Forest and Fields
	Disturbed broadleaved forest		Bamboo & Disturbed Broadleaved Forest
	Bamboo		Bamboo and Fields
	Tall open dry forest		

Over 30 percent of Jamaica, approximately 335,900 hectares, is classified as Forest



Approximately 88,000 hectares of this is classified as closed broadleaf forest with a closed canopy and minimal human disturbance. Most of the remaining forest is “disturbed broadleaf” (showing varying degrees of human disturbance) or natural dry open forest. Although the latter is often referred to as woodland or scrub, dry limestone forests are a key component of Jamaica’s forest ecology and economy. Just over 30 percent of the country is classified as Mixed use. These are areas of disturbed broadleaf forest mixed with another land use/forest cover, ie, Pine plantation, agricultural field, bauxite extraction site or bamboo. The remaining 39 percent of the area of Jamaica is classified as Non-forest and consists of wholly cultivated areas, water bodies, bare rock, bauxite mines, and buildings/other infrastructure.

Bamboo in Jamaica.

Bamboo is not indigenous to Jamaica. Indications are that it was probably introduced to the island in the nineteenth (19th) century by English colonists for strengthening river banks (river training). It is also believed that indentured workers from India brought bamboo seedlings with them in the same century. *Bambusa vulgaris* can now be found all over the island and it accounts for ninety-nine percent (99%) of the commonly

available bamboo resource. However, Jamaicans in general have a perception that it is merely wild vegetation to be used for peasant type applications and in cottage level industry. Hence it is grossly underutilized.

Table 1: Bamboo Occurrence by Hectarage			
Land Use/ Cover Classification	Area (ha)	Notes	
- bamboo	2,780	- lands with > 75% <i>B. vulgaris</i>	* Data based on satellite imagery from year 2000
- bamboo & fields	29, 155	- lands with > 50% <i>B. vulgaris</i>	
- bamboo & disturbed forests	12,690	- ditto	
Total Hectares:	44,625		

* Source: Forestry Department's National Forest Management and Conservation Plan (2001)

Table 2 below gives an indication of main bamboo species in Jamaica.

Table 2: Bamboo Occurrence by Species **		
Genus	Species	Notes
<i>Bambusa</i>	- <i>vulgaris</i>	- common (99%) localised species
	- <i>tulda</i>	- private collection
	- <i>multiplex</i>	- ditto
	- <i>tuldoides</i>	- Forestry Department research
<i>Dendrocalamus</i>	- <i>asper</i>	- ditto
	- <i>membranaceus</i>	- private collection
	- <i>brandisii</i>	- ditto
	- <i>strictus</i>	- ditto
<i>Thyrosostachys</i>	- <i>siamensis</i>	- ditto
<i>Melocanna</i>	- <i>bambusoides</i>	- ditto
Species not listed:		- local climbing species from the Blue Mountain elfin forest and minor exotics in private gardens

** Sources: The Forestry Department & Mr. John Hamilton, proprietor of OBF (below)

Although it has popular, small-scale utility in Jamaica, bamboo is not generally seen as an economic plant and is listed as an 'invasive' by the National Environmental Protection Agency. However, in recent times some individuals, (NGO) groups and government departments have seen its potential and are striving to improve its economic and cultural status.

Tourism

The tourism authorities have made use of this natural resource to enhance their product. There are a number of bamboo groves, most of which were planted to protect dirt road embankments. The most famous is the four-kilometre (4 km) long Bamboo Avenue on the south coast (pictured below).



Another activity of the tourism sector in which bamboo is utilized is river rafting:



Furniture & Craft

There are a few companies in the bamboo furniture business. The major player is the Original Bamboo Factory (OBF) which uses *Bambusa vulgaris* to make its furniture for sale to residences, hotels, restaurants, etc, locally and internationally. In this way it contributes to the rural economy of the island.



There are a number of small craft producers who use this resource as their main raw material. The range of products made is not very wide but the quality is generally good. Items include framed wall hangings, whistles, containers for candles, etc, trinket boxes, key rings and pen holders.

Use of bamboo to decrease rural poverty

A Bamboo Conversion Utilization Project managed by the Dolphin Head Trust (an NGO) in the rural western side of the island, has received a grant from the Japanese government under the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects. The project seeks to train unemployed youth to use bamboo in the manufacture of furniture through the hands-on assistance of Japanese volunteer trainers and cash grants. Phase I has seen the construction of the facility to house the operation and necessary equipment has been purchased. Over 50 persons were trained by the end of the first year in:

- Harvesting and curing bamboo
- Preparing bamboo for production
- Crafting the bamboo into the desired products

Miscellaneous

Other general uses for which bamboo is traditionally used include the construction of vending stalls, scaffolding, domestic clothesline sticks and agricultural yam vine runners. Around 1999 – 2000, a major effort was made by the Forestry Department to catalyze the utility of the more than twenty thousand hectares (>20,000 ha) of bamboo growing in its Forest Reserves. This was done through sponsorship from a private sector company (Jamaica Banana Producers) which allowed for the importation and demonstrational erection of a bamboo-concrete house, using material and technical resources from Costa Rica. It generated much interest from a wide variety of persons, groups and institutions, but has not realised the desired effect of utilising local bamboo for low-cost housing on a large scale.

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