

University of Oklahoma College of Law

## University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons

---

American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899

---

1-16-1888

**Coal deposits, Crow Indian Reservation. Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury transmitting estimates from the Secretary of the Interior of an appropriation for opening and developing the coal deposits on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana.**

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset>



Part of the [Indigenous, Indian, and Aboriginal Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

H.R. Exec. Doc. No. 81, 50th Cong., 1st Sess. (1888)

This House Executive Document is brought to you for free and open access by University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in American Indian and Alaskan Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817-1899 by an authorized administrator of University of Oklahoma College of Law Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [Law-LibraryDigitalCommons@ou.edu](mailto:Law-LibraryDigitalCommons@ou.edu).

COAL DEPOSITS, CROW INDIAN RESERVATION.

---

L E T T E R

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY

TRANSMITTING

*Estimates from the Secretary of the Interior of an appropriation for opening and developing the coal deposits on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana.*

---

JANUARY 16, 1888.—Referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs and ordered to be printed.

---

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,  
*January 13, 1888.*

SIR: I have the honor to transmit herewith, for the consideration of Congress, copy of a communication from the Secretary of the Interior of the 11th instant, and its inclosures, submitting an estimate of appropriation for \$3,000 for opening and developing the coal deposits on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana.

Respectfully, yours,

C. S. FAIRCHILD,  
*Secretary.*

THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

---

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
*Washington, January 11, 1888.*

SIR: In accordance with the provisions of section 4 of the act of July 7, 1884 (23 Stat., 254), I have the honor to inclose herewith, for presentation to Congress, copy of a letter of 10th instant from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, presenting in duplicate, in connection with other papers, a report of Lieutenant Biddle, of the Corps of Engineers of the U. S. Army, of an examination of the coal fields in the vicinity of Fort Custer, Mont., on the Crow Indian Reservation, with draught of an estimate of appropriation in the sum of \$3,000, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior in opening and developing the coal deposits and repairing road leading thereto on the Crow Reservation in the Territory of Montana, which the Commissioner recom-

mends may, if practicable, be inserted in the Indian appropriation bill for the ensuing fiscal year.

The matter has the approval of this Department.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully,

H. L. MULDROW,  
*Acting Secretary.*

The SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, January 10, 1888.*

SIR: I am in receipt, by Department reference, of a letter dated the 28th ultimo, from the Acting Secretary of War, transmitting a copy of a report of an examination made by First Lieut. John Biddle, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army, in conjunction with Special Agent Howard, of the coal-fields in the vicinity of Fort Custer, Mont., on the Crow Indian Reservation, which were the subject of office reports to the Department, dated August 3 and September 8 last, respectively, copies of which are herewith inclosed.

From Lieutenant Biddle's report it appears that at a point on the reservation, 5 miles southeast of the Indian Department farm-house, 2 miles above Grass Lodge Creek, and at a distance from the agency of about 30 miles, and from Fort Custer of about 41 miles, a vein of coal of considerable thickness crops out.

From the various outcroppings in the vicinity the quantity of coal would seem to be very great.

It is not suitable for blacksmithing purposes, but is a fairly good coal, well adapted for fuel, and as good and better than a great deal of the coal burned at various points in the Northwest.

It is now being used to good advantage at the agency in range and wood stoves.

The coal vein is located about 5 miles from the stage road. A good and not difficult road could be made over this 5 miles by building three or four small bridges and doing some small cutting down of hills and filling.

The stage and freight road would be much improved by cutting down hills at the river crossings and other places and building three or four small bridges at the creeks.

When this is done the cost of hauling to Fort Custer would not exceed \$6 or \$7 dollars a ton.

Lieutenant Biddle concludes his report by recommending an appropriation of \$3,000 to put the road in repair and open the vein of coal.

In office report to the Department of the 3d of August last, attention was drawn to the scarcity of timber on the Crow Reservation, and the yearly increasing difficulty of obtaining a supply of fuel for the use of the agency, the military at Fort Custer, and the Indians, except at very great labor and expense.

It is anticipated that the development of this coal vein will afford an abundant supply of excellent fuel for all parties, at a less cost than wood, and be a saving to the Government in many respects.

I have therefore prepared, and herewith submit, the draught of an estimate for an appropriation of \$3,000, for the purposes stated in Lieutenant Biddle's report, and have the honor to recommend that it

be transmitted to Congress with a request for its insertion (if practicable) in the Indian appropriation bill for the ensuing fiscal year.

Duplicate copies of Lieutenant Biddle's report are also herewith inclosed for the information of Congress.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. D. C. ATKINS,  
*Commissioner.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

---

For this amount, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, in opening and developing coal deposits, and repairing roads leading thereto, on the Crow Reservation in the Territory of Montana..... \$3,000

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
*Washington City, December 28, 1887.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 9th of September last, with its inclosures, relative to the opening of the coal bed upon the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana, for the use of the reservation and of Fort Custer, and requesting that an Army officer be detailed to co-operate with Special Indian Agent Howard in making an examination of the coal bed with a view of reporting, for submission to Congress, an estimate of the funds necessary to develop the same.

In reply I beg to state that, in accordance with your request, First Lieut. John Biddle, Corps of Engineers, was detailed for the duty indicated, and, in conjunction with Special Agent Howard, he has made an examination of the coal-fields in the vicinity of Fort Custer, Mont. I inclose a copy of his report, dated the 5th instant, from which it will be seen that he considered the coal contained in the beds satisfactory fuel, but not good for blacksmithing, and estimates the cost of putting the road leading to the coal beds in repair, and opening the vein of coal, at \$3,000, after which the estimated cost of hauling the coal to Fort Custer would not exceed \$6 or \$7 a ton.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

R. MACFEELY,  
*Acting Secretary of War.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

---

[Copy of indorsements on letter of the Acting Secretary of the Interior to the Secretary of War, of September 9, 1887, requesting that a competent officer of the Army may be detailed to co-operate with Special Agent Howard, of the Interior Department, in making a thorough examination of the coal bed upon the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana.]

*First indorsement.*

HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARMY, ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S OFFICE,  
*Washington, September 12, 1887.*

Official copy respectfully furnished the commanding general Department of Dakota, through headquarters Division of the Missouri, in order that he may take the necessary action in compliance with request of the Secretary of the Interior.

By command of Lieutenant-General Sheridan.

R. C. DRUM,  
*Adjutant-General.*

*Second indorsement.*

SAINT PAUL, MINN., September 19, 1887.

Official copy respectfully referred by the commanding general to First Lieut. John Biddle, Corps of Engineers, chief engineer officer Department of Dakota, who will perform the duty as required by the Lieutenant-General.

The commanding officer Fort Custer has been instructed to furnish the necessary transportation.

THOMAS M. VINCENT,  
*Assistant Adjutant-General.*

*Third indorsement.*

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF DAKOTA, CHIEF ENGINEER'S OFFICE,  
*Saint Paul, Minn., December 6, 1887.*

Respectfully returned to the Assistant Adjutant-General.

In obedience to orders I made examination of coal bed in conjunction with Special Agent Howard, and a report thereof is appended.

JOHN BIDDLE,  
*First Lieut. Corps of Engineers, Chief Engineer Officer, Department of Dakota.*

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF DAKOTA, CHIEF ENGINEER'S OFFICE,  
*Saint Paul, Minn., December 5, 1887.*

SIR: I have the honor to make the following report with reference to coal lands in the vicinity of Fort Custer, Mont., as ordered by indorsement dated Headquarters Department of Dakota, Saint Paul, Minn., September 19, 1887.

This order was received while in the vicinity of the Crow Indian Agency, Mont. After consultation with Special Agent Howard, as directed, we visited the coal vein described by Special Agents Walker and Howard in their report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs dated November 22, 1886.

This bed is thick and extensive. It is still on fire in several places and the coal, to a depth of at least 10 feet, is soft and crumbling and when brought to the atmosphere rapidly disintegrates.

Information about another vein discovered by one of the assistant farmers, and said to be better fuel and more accessible, led us to give up the first one.

The latter vein was visited, but on account of lack of facilities could not be thoroughly examined at that time.

After the late trouble with the Crow Indians was settled, I obtained from the commanding officer of Fort Custer, General N. A. M. Dudley, colonel First Cavalry, a detachment of five men, with picks and shovels. The vein was then thoroughly examined. Also another vein about 4 miles distant, discovered by an Indian named Flat-head Woman, and reputed very fine and accessible, was examined but was found to be shaly and useless as a fuel.

The former vein crops out at various places over a line of about a mile in length, but principally upon a stretch of hillside a hundred yards long, scattered along which are a number of large pieces of petrified wood. At this latter place a hole was dug to the bottom of the vein and about 6 feet in the hillside to a point where the earth covering was about 4 feet thick. Samples were taken from various parts of the seam for trial.

The coal was taken to the agency and to Fort Custer, where it was tried by the blacksmith in a forge, in wood stoves, and in a large kitchen range.

The coal is a brown coal. It is very hard in the seam, being with difficulty chipped off with a pick, and in one place we used a small quantity of powder. It is black at first, but turns brown on surface and seams when exposed to atmosphere. It can be obtained in large chunks—liable, however, to scale off in flat pieces when handled or transported.

There is considerable ash and a sulphur smell when burning. The coal burns readily with a yellow flame and considerable heat.

With a grate or coal stove it would, I think, be a very satisfactory fuel. It is not good for blacksmithing.

In all it is a fairly good coal, and as good and better than a great deal of the coal burned at various points in the Northwest. It is now being used to good advantage at the agency in range and wood stoves.

The vein where we opened it is about 4 feet thick. The top is shaly and would make a fair roofing. There is some little water, but the facilities for drainage are excellent.

From the various outcroppings in the vicinity the quantity of fuel would seem very great. The location is 5 miles southeast of the Indian department farm house, 2 miles above Grass Lodge Creek. It is 3 miles from the Little Big Horn River, and one-half mile from a small tributary called Owl or Ash Creek. Cotton-wood in fair quantities can be obtained from the latter for roofing or other purposes,

The distance to the Indian agency is about 30 miles and to Fort Custer about 41. Of this 5 miles is from the vein to the stage road and the remainder along the stage road. The first part could be made a good and not difficult road by building three or four small bridges and doing some small cutting down of hills and filling.

The stage and freight road would be much improved by cutting down hills at the river crossings and other places, and building three or four small bridges at the creeks. After this is done the cost of hauling to Fort Custer would not exceed \$6 or \$7 a ton.

To put the road in repair and open the vein of coal I recommend an appropriation of \$3,000.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOHN BIDDLE,  
*First Lieut. Corps of Engineers, Chief Engineer Officer, Department of Dakota.*

The ADJUTANT-GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF DAKOTA,  
*Saint Paul, Minn.*

[First indorsement.]

HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF DAKOTA,  
*Saint Paul, Minn., December 14, 1887.*

Respectfully forwarded through the headquarters Division of the Missouri, in connection with reference from the headquarters of the Army, by indorsement of September 12, 1887.

THOS. H. RUGER,  
*Brigadier-General Commanding.*

[Second indorsement.]

HEADQUARTERS DIVISION OF THE MISSOURI,  
*Chicago, December 17, 1887.*

Respectfully forwarded to the Adjutant-General of the Army.

ALFRED H. TERRY,  
*Major-General Commanding.*

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, August 3, 1887.*

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt, by Department reference, of a letter from the Acting Secretary of War, dated the 18th June last, inclosing copy of correspondence had between United States Indian Agent Williamson and the military authorities, on the subject of cutting timber on the Crow Reservation for the purpose of supplying fuel to Fort Custer, Mont., and (in accordance with the suggestion of the commanding general of the Department of Dakota, thereon indorsed) requesting permission to cut dead wood, not exceeding 2,500 cords, to be taken from the Pine Ridge, indicated on the accompanying map.

I am also in receipt, by like reference, of a further communication from the honorable Secretary of War, dated 29th June last, on the same subject.

Agent Williamson having been directed by this office to make a full report in the premises, I am now in receipt of his reply, dated 7th ultimo (copy inclosed), from which I extract the following:

“While it may be a fact that much dead and fallen timber can be obtained from the said Pine Ridge, yet the necessities of the Crow Indians will not admit of the disposal of any wood, either dead and fallen, or standing and growing, for any purposes whatsoever, save for building purposes—for cabins, stables, fencing, etc., and for fuel for the Crow tribe, and what may be necessary for use at the agency. In such an important matter as is now under consideration the present necessities or the requirements of a few years to come of this tribe form but a slight factor in the premises. The very limited amount of timber on the reservation must be husbanded in each and every respect most carefully to meet the demands of a tribe progressing as rapidly as are the Crows in the direction of civilization. The supply of timber, as I have already informed the honorable Commissioner, and repeatedly informed the authorities at Fort Custer, is wholly inadequate for the improvements of the Indian farms, and for necessary fuel not a stick can be spared; far too much has already been used by the military, and to allow any more to be used for any purpose not redounding to the particular and immediate benefit of the Indians, would be an act of injustice and

wrong to the Indians wholly beyond compensation possible on part of the Government.

In regard to the statement of the department commander that there are several thousand cords of dead wood in the Pine Ridge of no present use to the Indians, and the danger of its rotting before it can be utilized for their benefit, Agent Williamson states that there are very many allotments on the Big Horn and other streams very insufficiently supplied with timber either for buildings or fuel, and that the Indians residing on such allotments will at a comparatively early day be compelled to obtain any and all timber, whether for improvements or fuel, from this same Pine Ridge and the dead timber thereon will not have an opportunity to rot.

The agent further states that a large number of Indian families will have to obtain their fuel from the Pine Ridge, either wholly or in part, within from three to five or six years, and that when the extremely severe weather of the long winters is taken into consideration, necessitating the use of an immense quantity of fuel by every family, it will be seen that the dead wood referred to is not at all in excess of the requirements of the tribe.

He also refers to the existence of a coal bed on the reservation, about 20 miles southeast of the agency, which if opened will afford an abundant supply of excellent fuel for the post and the agency, at a less cost than wood; and he suggests that some joint action be taken by both Departments for the proper development of the mine. In this way the vexed question of fuel supply may be permanently settled. It appears that last winter the agent was compelled to haul fuel from 12 to 20 miles, and another season they will have to haul 20 to 30 miles. He doubts whether with present force and teams an adequate supply of fuel can be obtained for another winter.

I deem the suggestions of Agent Williamson in regard to the coal bed worthy of the most serious consideration, and although I am not now prepared, without further investigation, to make any specific recommendation on the subject, I would suggest that the attention of the War Department be especially called to it, in the hope that by the combined action of the two Departments some means may be devised by which the coal can be utilized for the benefit of both branches of the service and of the Indians.

Whilst I am fully sensible of the necessities of the military arm of the service, and under ordinary circumstances should feel concluded by existing regulations of the Department touching the right of the military to take the necessary supply of wood for fuel from the reservation in common with the Indians and the Indian service, I regret to say that I do not see how, in the light of Agent Williamson's report, this office can, consistently with a due regard for the interests of the Crow Indians, favor the present application of the War Department.

The papers are herewith returned.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. B. UPSHAW,  
*Acting Commissioner.*

The SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, September 8, 1887.*

SIR: Referring to my report of the 3d ultimo, suggesting that the attention of the War Department be called to the existence of a valuable coal bed on the Crow Reservation, Montana, near the agency, in the hope that by combined action of the two Departments some means may be devised by which the coal can be utilized for the benefit of both branches of the service and of the Indians; also to the inclosed letter, dated 30th ultimo, from the Acting Secretary of War, stating that the lieutenant-general of the Army recommends that "this coal bed being under the control of the Indian Department, that Department open it or authorize it to be opened, so that the post of Fort Custer may be supplied with fuel from it," I have the honor to recommend that the honorable Secretary of War be requested to cause a competent engineer officer to be detailed to co-operate with Special Agent J. R. Howard, now on duty on the reservation, in making a thorough examination of the coal bed in question and report thereon, with a view to submitting an estimate to the coming Congress for the necessary funds to develop the same.

Pertinent to this recommendation, and as having an intelligent bearing on the subject, I inclose herewith a copy of a report made to this office by Special Agents Walker and Howard, November 22, 1886.

I respectfully ask that this office be advised of the action had by the War Department, should the recommendation meet your approval.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. D. C. ATKINS,  
*Commissioner.*