

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

3-10-1896

Uncompahgre Reservation.

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



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

Recommended Citation

S. Doc. No. 161. 54th Cong., 1st Sess. (1896)

This Senate 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.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES.

MARCH 11, 1896.—Laid on the table and ordered to be printed.

The VICE-PRESIDENT presented the following:

LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, IN RESPONSE TO THE SENATE RESOLUTION OF THE 4TH OF MARCH, AS TO THE REASON THE NONAGRICULTURAL AND UNALLOTTED LANDS OF THE UNCOMPAGRE INDIAN RESERVATION HAVE NOT BEEN RESTORED TO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN AND PROCLAIMED OPEN TO ENTRY AND LOCATION.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
Washington, March 10, 1896.

SIR: I am in receipt of Senate resolution of the 4th instant directing me to inform the Senate for what reason the nonagricultural and unallotted lands of the Uncompahgre Indian Reservation have not been restored to the public domain and proclaimed open to entry and location as prescribed by sections 20 and 21 of the act of Congress approved August 15, 1894, entitled "An act making appropriations for the current and contingent expenses of the Indian Department," etc.; and, further, to inform the Senate when, in my judgment, said lands will be opened to entry and location.

In response to said resolution I have the honor to call your attention to pages 10 and 37 of my annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1895, a copy of which I herewith transmit. That report sets forth the fact that valuable discoveries of "gilsonite" have been explored by officers of the Geological Survey on this reservation since the date of the passage of the act of August 15, 1894, supra, and shows that if these lands are opened to entry in the ordinary way the Government would be deprived of extensive profits which should go into its Treasury.

The information set forth in my report with reference to the valuable mineral on said land had not been so fully brought to the attention of Congress at the date of the passage of the act providing for the restoration to the public domain of the unallotted nonagricultural lands, and in that report I recommended such legislation as would provide for the disposal of the gilsonite deposits by lease or sale to the highest bidder.

As to the time when said lands will be opened to entry and location under the provisions of the act of August, 1894, I have to state that the matter of said opening is wholly under the control of the President, and I am not at present advised as to what his intentions are in that respect.

Very respectfully,

HOKE SMITH, *Secretary.*

The PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE.

[Extract from Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1895, p. 10.]

Uncompahgre Reservation.—The Commission provided for by the act of Congress was appointed to visit the Uncompahgre Reservation and to allot agricultural lands to the Indians there located. I am not prepared to concur with that portion of the report of the Commissioner in which he objects to crediting the trust fund of these Indians with the lands assigned to them. If they are given agricultural lands, as the agreement specifies, I see no reason why the credits should not be made upon the trust fund, unless the delay in the allotment is cause for complaint on the part of the Indians.

In that portion of this report which discusses the work of the Geological Survey will be found an informal report from the geologist who has examined the gilsonite upon the lands of this reservation which will not be needed for Indian allotment and which belongs to the Government. It will be seen that these deposits, while they cover only a small area of land, are of immense value.

If they are open to entry in the ordinary way a few persons will obtain them at practically no cost, and shortly thereafter they will become the property of large companies engaged in using this mineral. I believe the true policy should be for the Government to sell these deposits to the highest bidders, or else to lease them. If they are disposed of under existing law a few thousand dollars will be picked up by the enterprising men who first go upon them, and then enormous profits, which at least in part should go into the Treasury of the Government, will be made by the companies organized to operate them.

I recommend the passage of such legislation as will provide for the disposal of the gilsonite deposits by lease or sale to the highest bidder.

[Extract from Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1895, p. 37.]

Mineral deposits on Uncompahgre Indian Reservation.—Mr. Eldridge, of the Survey, was detailed informally to examine the mineral resources of the Uncompahgre Indian Reservation. He reports that gilsonite is the only mineral of known commercial value occurring on the reservation. He finds a number of large veins varying from 4 to 12 feet in width and of unknown but evidently considerable depth, from their geological relations. This indicates a vast deposit of gilsonite.

The bituminous shale, sandstone, and limestone might be of commercial value under favorable conditions for transportation. Practically the same materials elsewhere are employed either for paving purposes or made to yield up their hydrocarbons as commercial oils.

The gilsonite occurs as the filling of extensive cracks in the earth's crust. The deposits are therefore fissure veins. They are all nearly or quite vertical, and their general trend is north 45 degrees to 55 degrees west, a direction common to many of the folds in the mountain and plateau regions adjoining.

The number of important veins of gilsonite at present known is six—four in the eastern half of the reservation, one probably crossing the western edge of the reserve near the fortieth parallel, and one in the opened strip between the Uncompahgre and Uinta reservations, near Fort Duchesne, the southeastern end of which perhaps lies within the Uncompahgre Reserve.

Of the four veins in the eastern half of the reservation, one—the Black Dragon—is exposed on a tributary of the West Fork of Evacuation Creek, 20 miles south of White River, near the parallel of 39° 45'. This vein may be traced to the head of Asphalt Creek, and has a known length of between 3 and 4 miles. Its width at an opening near the southeastern end of the fissure as exposed is 8 feet 6 inches; from this point southeastward the diminution in size is very rapid.

The second and third veins in the eastern portion of the reservation are known as the "Little Bonanza" and "Big Bonanza," the former to the west of the latter. They are approximately parallel, and from 200 to 500 feet apart. They were traced to the north of White River for nearly 3 miles, and Mr. McAndrews, of the Indian police, states also that he has followed them southeastward across the river quite to the Colorado line, in all, a distance of 10 or 12 miles. The maximum width of the Little Bonanza observed was 9 feet, of the Big Bonanza 13 feet 6 inches, but locally the Little Bonanza exceeds the Big Bonanza in width.

The "Cowboy," the fourth and largest of the important group of gilsonite veins in the eastern portion of the reservation, lies about 2½ miles northeast of the Bonanza veins, with which it is parallel. This vein has thus far been found only north of the river, but it here has a probable length of at least 5 miles, being clearly defined in outcrop for over half this distance, while for the remainder evidences of its presence exist in the float particles found in the soil and wash covering it. The maximum thickness of this vein was found to be 18 feet.

The thickness of the veins varies from the figures given above to 0 at the ends, and they are observed to widen and contract from point to point; but for much of the lengths given they appear to maintain an excellent workable width, from 4 to 12 feet.

The vein on which the St. Louis Gilsonite Company have opened a mine, lying 3 miles east of Fort Duchesne, is the original discovery. It is of the same nature as those already described, but is only about 4 feet wide, a width, however, held with little variation for between 1 and 2 miles, possibly even farther. The vein near the western edge of the reservation has not yet been visited.

The discovery of such veins is a matter for the prospector rather than for the geologist, as the position of a crack in broad and gently folded strata is undeterminable by any structural laws.

The amount of gilsonite in the region examined is enormous, for the depth of the fissures, though unknown, can not but be considerable—from 1,000 to several thousand feet—and, with their length and width, is indicative of phenomenal yield.

The presence on the Uncompahgre Reservation of minerals other than that already referred to is extremely questionable, particularly so in the case of the metallic ores—zinc, lead, copper, silver, gold. The entire area of the reservation, so far as a general survey and the evidence of earlier explorers (Hayden and others) show, is one of unaltered sedimentary rocks of Eocene age, devoid of all traces of eruptive action past or present.

The Survey has also contributed valuable assistance to other bureaus of the Department in reporting as to the feasibility of irrigation at designated points and in the examination of alleged mineral deposits.

