

Tongue Mesa Coal Field

Location

The field is located in parts of Gunnison, Montrose, and Ouray, Counties, in southwestern Colorado and is partly within the Uncompahgre National Forest. The following information is taken from Hettinger and others (in press).

Stratigraphy

The coal is present within an isolated remnant of Upper Cretaceous rocks in the northern San Juan Mountains. These strata were referred to as the Mesaverde Formation by Landis (1959). The geology of the field was mapped by Dickinson (1987a, 1987b, 1988) and he reassigned about 200 ft of coal-bearing strata to the Fruitland Formation. Landis (1959) described the area as being concealed by heavy vegetation, landslides, talus, and glacial deposits.

Table. Stratigraphy—Tongue Mesa coal field.

Stratigraphic units	Depositional environment	Thickness (ft)
Kirtland Shale	alluvial plain	1,000
Fruitland Formation	coastal plain; major coal	200
Pictured Cliffs Sandstone	nearshore marine	50-250

Coal Deposits

The Fruitland is exposed at a few localities and is buried to a depth of as much as 2,500 ft (Dickinson, 1987a, 1987b, 1988). The Fruitland contains one laterally extensive coal bed that ranges from about 20 to 40 ft in thickness, and the formation contains 3 to 5 additional coal beds that are about 5 to 13 ft thick. Dickinson states that the coal-bearing strata were drilled for Federal permits and leases but the data was not available to him.

Coal Quality

Coal in the Tongue Mesa coal field has an ash yield of 6.7 to 8.4 percent, a sulfur content of 0.5 to 0.9 percent, and a calorific value of 9,350 to 10,200 Btu/lb on an as-received basis (Hornbaker and others, 1976). The apparent rank of the coal is subbituminous B (U.S. Bureau of Mines, 1937, p. 110–111) and subbituminous C (Dickinson, 1987a, 1987b, 1988).

Resources

Landis (1959) estimated that a 58-square-mile area of the Tongue Mesa field contained a coal resource of about 2,355 million short tons. Hornbaker and others (1976) thought the resources could be as high as 4,000 million short tons, apparently based on drilling information.

Production History

Underground mining took place in the Tongue Mesa coal field between the 1890's and 1940's (Murray, 1981) and numerous small mines operated in the area (Dickinson, 1987a, 1988).

References

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