

Assessment of Coal Resources of the United States of America

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The recently completed National Coal Resource Assessment of the coals of the United States has taken a much different approach from earlier assessments by the U.S. Geological Survey. It focuses only on those coal resources that will supply a significant portion of the nation's fossil fuel needs during the first third of the 21st Century. The assessment involves measuring the quantity, characterizing the quality, and evaluating the availability and economic recoverability of these resources.

Utilizing GIS technology, the current assessment provides ready access to the data upon which the assessment is based, and allows the user to process and portray this information in a variety of ways. The current assessment is based on a geographically located database that has been verified and checked for accuracy. This allows for calculation of the statistical uncertainties that are an integral part of any resource assessment.

For purposes of this assessment, the nation was divided into regions. Teams of geoscientists compiled bed maps, developed the databases, and reported coal volumes within their region. The five major coal producing regions of the United States that were investigated are: the northern and central Appalachian Basin, the Illinois Basin, the Gulf of Mexico coastal plain, the Powder River Basin and the northern Great Plains, and the Rocky Mountains and the Colorado Plateau. The assessment considers relative supply from each region as well as the use of competing fuels for future electric power generation.