Meeting the challenge of balancing America’s needs for both nonrenewable resources and a clean, healthy environment requires accurate and unbiased scientific data. The ongoing work of U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) scientists provides information crucial to the creation of sound public policies that will ensure future supplies of mineral resources while protecting the health of our Nation’s citizens. Three archives, in Anchorage, Alaska, Spokane, Washington, and Tucson, Arizona, are maintained by the USGS to help policymakers, industry leaders, government officials, elected representatives, and the general public make informed decisions on mineral issues based on accurate, up-to-date, and impartial mineral-resource information.

Alaska Technical Data Unit

In 1896, three men discovered gold on the Klondike River in the Yukon Territory of Canada. When news of the discovery reached the outside world in the summer of 1897, thousands of men and women began a great rush to the Yukon Territory and Alaska. In January 1898, Congress appropriated funds for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to make geologic and topographic surveys in Alaska. As geologists made plans for fieldwork, Walter C. Mendenhall wrote in a letter to Alfred H. Brooks:

> Interest here among a good many of the younger men is centered in the Alaskan plans which Mr. Willis and the Director are considering at present. The bill appropriating $20,000 was signed by the president a week or more ago. This with the unexpended appropriation of $5,000 made last year gives them a good working sum. The plan being considered at present involves the sending in of four or five different parties, each in charge of a geologist and accompanied by a topographer and several camp hands. The tendency seems to be to choose pretty big men to put in charge of these parties. Spurr, of course, will have charge of one. Keith has been offered another, and will probably take it if he can agree with the Director upon the time of starting. He thinks that he cannot be ready before the first of May, while the parties are expected to start at least a month earlier. Eldridge has been mentioned for another, but I believe that the matter has not been broached to him yet, unless it was brought up yesterday. It was hoped at one time that I.C. Russell might be willing to take a command, but I don’t know whether he has been communicated with or not. Schrader rather put himself out of the game earlier, when he thought there would be nothing open to him but an assistantship, by expressing a preference for work in the States. I think that if an independent party were offered him under the new plans, he would take it, and I should not wonder if one were offered him. I am sorry that Hayes is not here, for there is no doubt that he would be given an opportunity to carry out some of his cherished plans for exploration there. Your own application is being considered, but I do not know what your chances are. I think, though, that the chances of the younger men depend in some measure upon the attitude of the more experienced geologists. Several of these latter will be offered parties first; if they don’t want them, the boys may be given a chance. I applied some time since for a transfer to
the West and took the occasion to mention
that I was in a receptive mood so far as Alaska was concerned. B.W.
[Bailey Willis?] called me up the other
day and told me confidentially that he
didn’t think that I had a ghost of a
show to get an Alaskan assignment,
since something would be required
there besides a superabundance of
W.Va. experience. I told him that that
was all right but I should like to have
some assurance that the W.Va. dose
was not to be unnecessarily prolonged.

He made me happy by saying that I
should be sent west this summer, per-
haps with Smith in northern Wash-
ington. Other plans will not be touched,
of course, until the Alaskan assign-
ments are settled, but Tom Reed and
some others have set their faces to-
ward an early adjournment of con-
gress, hence there seems to be some
ground for hope that the regular ap-
propriation will not drag along until
long after July 1st, as it usually does
with a new congress.

As it turned out, both Brooks and
Mendenhall realized their ambitions that
year, each leading a field party to
Alaska, along with the aforementioned
Spurr, Eldridge, and Schrader. Brooks
continued to work in Alaska and served
as head of Alaskan operations from
1903 until his death in 1924.

Mendenhall returned for three more
field seasons (1900–2) and eventually
served as Director of the U.S. Geologi-
cal Survey from 1931 until 1943.

Mendenhall’s letter is just one of the
historical records preserved in the
Alaska Technical Data Unit (ATDU)
in Anchorage, Alaska. ATDU is the
archive of original geologic field notes,
maps, correspondence, and unpublished
reports that document the history of
USGS work in Alaska. The two major
categories of reference materials are the
Project History files and the Geologic
Subject files.

The Project History files encompass
much of the raw data from which the
Federal geologic maps of Alaska have
been compiled. These files include:
• Geologic notebooks containing the
original field observations, descrip-
tions, and sketches by USGS geolo-
gists working in Alaska since 1891.
More than 3,700 notebooks are ar-
 ranged in numerical order and are
indexed in a computerized data
base. Microfilms of these note-
books are also available for onsite
use at the USGS in Menlo Park,
California.
• Map files containing more than 850
sets of original field sheets and sketch
maps, map compilations, cross sec-
tions, diagrams, and annotated aerial
photographs. These materials are ar-
ranged by quadrangle and are also in-
dexed in a computerized data base.
• Paleontological notebooks contain-
ing fossil identifications made at
various localities in Alaska since
1898. These notebooks are arranged
by year of collection, and there is
no index for this record group.
• Petrographic thin sections made
from rock samples collected in the
field for analysis and description.

More than 30,000 sections are in-
dexed by year and collector.

The Geologic Subject files incorpo-
rate more than 6,500 files containing un-
published reports, speeches and lectures,
correspondence, reprints, photographs,
and historical materials relating to
USGS activities in Alaska. Also in-
cluded are some reports by the Alaska
Power Authority and the U.S. Atomic
Energy Commission, handwritten trans-
lations of Russian geologic texts, and a
small collection of Alaskan military ter-
rain studies and highway reports. These
files are indexed under 31 subject head-
ings in a computerized data base.

The Economic Mineral files are a
subset of the Geologic Subject files that
pertain to mineral resources, mineral
commodities, and mining activities in
Alaska. These files contain news
clippings, company reports, mine
histories and production summaries, and
USGS evaluations of “strategic mineral”
properties for the Defense Minerals
Administration and its successors.

Digital catalogs of the materials in
ATDU have been compiled, utilizing
desktop PC’s and the Microsoft Access
relational-database software, running in
a Windows NT environment. Access to
this archive is by appointment only;
written and electronic requests are also
accepted. Researchers should first con-
duct a thorough search of the published
literature to determine which scientists
have worked in their area of interest and
whose notes and maps might be most
useful to them. Access to certain materials
may be restricted for nongovernmental em-
ployees. Owing to the irrereplaceable na-
ture of items in ATDU, only copies will
be supplied, and reproduction costs will
be born by the requestor. For further in-
formation, call or write to:

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Property Files from Federal Government
Exploration-Assistance Programs
(1950–74)

In 1950, Congress enacted the
Defense Production Act, which author-
ized the President to make provision for
the encouragement of exploration,
development, and mining of critical and
strategic minerals, metals, and
materials. The President delegated his
authority to the Department of the
Interior, among other agencies, and the
Secretary of the Interior established the
Defense Minerals Administration
(DMA). One of the purposes of the
DMA was to provide Government
support for exploration of unknown or
undeveloped mineral deposits. To this
end, the DMA established a program
that would provide funds for projects
which sought or developed sources of
strategic or critical metals and minerals.

When the DMA was terminated in
November 1951, the Department of the
Interior formed the Defense Minerals
Exploration Administration (DMEA)
and continued the program until June
1958. In August of that year, Congress
enacted a law that authorized the
Secretary of the Interior to provide
financial assistance which would
promote exploration for domestic
mineral reserves, and the Secretary
formed the Office of Minerals Explora-
tion (OME). In 1965, OME was trans-
ferred to the USGS, where it remained
until Congress terminated funding in
1974. Contracts with these agencies
provided financial assistance for
exploration on a joint-participation
basis.

These contracts are documented in
over 5,000 property files (called “dockets”) generated by the DMA-DMEA-OME exploration-assistance programs. The first item in most dockets is the property owner’s program application, which would contain information concerning the property’s location, commodity to be pursued, and funds requested. This should be followed by a site evaluation and recommendation. Additional reports might detail the status of the application, specifics of any financial contract awarded, results of exploration, production summaries, payback schedules, interim evaluations, and contract-completion data. The dockets reflect program activities carried out in 44 States; only Delaware, Indiana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Rhode Island are not represented.

Until 1996, these dockets were stored at several locations throughout the United States. In the spring of that year, they were consolidated into the DMA-DMEA-OME Archive, located in the USGS Spokane Field Office. The integrated collection occupies approximately 480 cubic feet and has been indexed in a Microsoft Access database. Interested parties may access dockets at the Spokane office or make arrangements to have them copied for offsite inspection.

The Spokane Field Office also archives many project files of the former U.S. Bureau of Mines, as well as the office files of several Bureau geologists who did mineral-resource studies.

For further information about the exploration-assistance files and other archival materials at the USGS Field Office in Spokane, call or write to:

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Spokane, WA 99201–1087  
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Latin American Archive

From 1989 until 1995, the USGS operated the Center for Inter-American Mineral Resource Investigations (CIMRI) in Tucson, Arizona. This center served as a focal point for the development and exchange of minerals information between public mineral-resources agencies and the mining industry in the Americas. The USGS, through CIMRI, actively sought to develop cooperative working relationships among governments, organizations, and individuals interested in the mineral resources of Latin America and the Caribbean region. CIMRI undertook four basic interrelated activities to accomplish its mission: (1) development and exchange of minerals information, (2) cooperative mineral-resource investigations, (3) technology transfer and training, and (4) research.

CIMRI collected and disseminated published and unpublished information on the mineral resources of Latin America. Much of this information was archived for public inspection. This archive includes maps, files, reports, bibliographies, computerized data bases, and many related materials.

In 1995, CIMRI was abolished; however, the archive remains. This eclectic, multilingual collection is
organized by country and consists largely of “gray literature,” unpublished or difficult-to-obtain reports that would not be easily available in most libraries. The archive is open to the public from 8:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and is used by researchers from around the world who are interested in the mineral resources of Latin America. The Latin American archive, located in the Environment and Natural Resources Building on the University of Arizona campus, currently consists of approximately 55 linear feet of materials housed in file cabinets, an additional 61 feet on shelves, and 39 drawers of maps. This archive of the Center for Inter-American Mineral Resource Investigations includes such materials as The Mineral Deposits of Peru, an unpublished 1,715-page manuscript and more than 300 accompanying maps by former USGS geologist Frank Simons, who worked in Peru; and the Latin American portion of the field notes and correspondence of V.F. Hollister, a consultant who worked throughout the Americas.

To receive further information about the Latin American archive or to make arrangements to visit, call or write to:

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These three archives are maintained by the U.S. Geological Survey to help our officials and the public to make informed decisions based on accurate and impartial mineral resource information. Keeping our environment healthy and supplying America’s need for nonrenewable resources requires unbiased scientific data. The availability of these data is crucial for the creation of sound public policies. USGS scientists are providing important information, now and for the future, that will keep our environment healthy and protect our Nation citizens.

Karen Bolm, Dave Frank, and Jill L. Schneider

Graphic design by Judy Weathers

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