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1. USGS Report Estimates 83 Billion Metric Tons of Gulf Coast Coal

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Body

(TNSLrpt) -- The U.S. Geological Survey issued 'Regional Characterization of Coal Resources in the Gulf Coast Coal Region--In Support of Coal as a Potential Source for Critical Minerals and Rare Earth Elements', Scientific Investigations Report 2026-5045, by Peter D. Warwick, Robert C. Reedy, and Bridget R. Scanlon. Prepared with The University of Texas at Austin, **Bureau of Economic Geology** and published in Reston, Virginia, in 2026, the report says the Gulf Coast coal region holds about 83 billion metric tons of coal in the upper 90 meters of the subsurface.

Resource picture

The study used 31,181 drill-hole, outcrop, mine, and core data points to map cumulative coal thickness across the Gulf Coast Coal Region with kriging methods. The authors divided the area into east, north, and west model regions and built isopleth maps to estimate how much coal remains by state and by depth.

Texas holds the largest share of the remaining resource at 32 billion metric tons, or 39 percent of the total, followed by Mississippi at 20 billion metric tons, Louisiana at 12 billion metric tons, Tennessee at 8.5 billion metric tons, and Arkansas at 5.1 billion metric tons. Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, and Missouri each account for less than 5 percent of the total, with Georgia estimated at only 7 million metric tons.

Why it matters

The report frames the coal resource as more than an energy estimate. It says the region's lignite and bituminous coal could serve as a possible source for critical minerals and rare earth elements, helping reduce U.S. reliance on imported materials.

The authors note that recent studies have found elevated rare earth and critical mineral content in some Gulf Coast lignites, including coal from Texas mines such as Gibbons Creek and San Miguel. They say the coal resource estimate is a necessary first step before evaluating how much of those elements might actually be recoverable.

Methods and scale

The report relies on geologic data collected from coal exploration drilling, measured outcrops, and mine sections, then applies a regional assessment across roughly 132,000 square kilometers. It also compares the Gulf Coast coal province with the Fort Union region, another major lignite-bearing area in the United States.

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The estimated original resource rises with depth, from about 4.1 billion metric tons in the upper 15 meters to about 84 billion metric tons in the upper 90 meters. The report also says about 1.88 billion metric tons have been mined in the region since 1983.

Bottom line

The report's conclusion is cautious but clear: the Gulf Coast Coal Region contains a large shallow coal inventory that may matter for both energy and mineral supply planning. It says future work should focus on areas with higher rare earth and critical mineral concentrations to better assess commercial potential.

-- Moira Sirois, Targeted News Service

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View full text here: <https://pubs.usgs.gov/sir/2026/5045/sir20265045.pdf>

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