

Calendar No. 52

109TH CONGRESS }
1st Session }

SENATE

{ REPORT
109-37

BIG HORN BENTONITE ACT

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MARCH 14, 2005.—Ordered to be printed
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Mr. DOMENICI, from the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 97]

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, to which was referred the bill (S. 97) to provide for the sale of bentonite in Big Horn County, Wyoming, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE MEASURE

The purpose of S. 97 is to provide for the sale of bentonite on military lands in Big Horn County, Wyoming.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

Bentonite is currently being mined on public lands in Big Horn County, Wyoming, on the north and south sides of military lands that were withdrawn for military purposes by Executive Order 7491, dated November 14, 1936. These lands were withdrawn from settlement, location, sale or entry and reserved for use by the War Department. The lands remain withdrawn and reserved under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Army for use as a target range. They are currently used by the Wyoming National Guard.

Providing authority to mine bentonite on a specified portion of these withdrawn lands will avoid the bypass of the Federal mineral and the opportunity to follow the natural sequence for mining. The Wyoming National Guard does not object to the mining of bentonite on the specified lands at this time, and has indicated the mining operations will not inhibit military training.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 97 was introduced by Senator Enzi on January 24, 2005. At the business meeting on February 16, 2005, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources ordered S. 97 favorably reported. A similar bill (S. 203) was introduced by Senator Enzi in the 108th Congress. The Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests held a hearing on the bill on February 27, 2003. S. Hrg. 108–10. At the business meeting on July 14, 2004, the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources ordered S. 203, as amended, favorably reported. S. Rept. 108–319. S. 203 passed the Senate, by unanimous consent, on September 15, 2004.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, in an open business session on February 16, 2005, by a voice vote of a quorum present, recommends that the Senate pass S. 97.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1 contains the short title.

Section 2 provides definitions used in the bill.

Section 3(a) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior, with the consent of the Secretary of the Army, to permit the mining and removal of bentonite on the covered land.

Subsection (b) directs the Secretary of the Interior to enter into a sole source contract for the mining and removal of the bentonite that provides for the payment of \$1.00 per ton of bentonite removed.

Subsection (c) sets forth requirements relating to the terms and conditions applicable to the mining and removal of bentonite from the covered land. It provides that in carrying out this Act, the Secretary is not required to amend any land use plan under section 202 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The subsection also provides that upon completion of mining and reclamation under this Act, the party entering into the sole source contract with the Secretary shall have no remaining interest in the covered land.

Section 4(a) directs the Secretary of the Interior to suspend any mining activity and close the covered land if the Secretary of the Army requires the land for the purpose of national defense or security.

Subsection 4(b) addresses liability.

COST AND BUDGETARY CONSIDERATIONS

The following estimate of costs of this measure has been provided by the Congressional Budget Office.

FEBRUARY 28, 2005.

Hon. PETE V. DOMENICI,
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has prepared the enclosed cost estimate for S. 97, the Big Horn Bentonite Act.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contacts are Megan Carroll and Deborah Reis.

Sincerely,

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN,
Director.

Enclosure.

S. 97—Big Horn Bentonite Act

CBO estimates that implementing S. 97 would not significantly affect the federal budget. Enacting the bill could increase offsetting receipts (a credit against direct spending), but by less than \$5,000. Enacting the bill would not affect revenues. S. 97 contains no inter-governmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

S. 97 would open 20 acres of federal land in Big Horn County, Wyoming, to bentonite mining. (Under current law, that land is closed to all mineral development.) Under the bill, the federal government would receive \$1 for each ton of bentonite removed from the affected land. Based on information obtained from the Bureau of Land Management about the amount of bentonite located within the affected land, CBO estimates that, over the next several years, S. 97 would generate a total of less than \$5,000 in offsetting receipts. We also estimate that any increase in administrative costs to the agency would be minimal.

The CBO staff contacts for this estimate are Megan Carroll and Deborah Reis. This estimate was approved by Peter H. Fontaine, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

REGULATORY IMPACT EVALUATION

In compliance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee makes the following evaluation of the regulatory impact which would be incurred in carrying out S. 203.

The bill is not a regulatory measure in the sense of imposing Government-established standards or significant economic responsibilities on private individuals and businesses.

No personal information would be collected in administering the program. Therefore, there would be no impact on personal privacy.

Little, if any, additional paperwork would result from the enactment of S. 97, as ordered reported.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

The views of the Administration were included in testimony received by the Committee at a hearing on S. 203 during the 108th Congress on February 27, 2005.

STATEMENT OF JIM HUGHES, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, BUREAU
OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mr. Chairman, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear here today to discuss S. 203, a bill to open certain withdrawn lands in Big Horn County, Wyoming, to locatable mineral development

for bentonite mining. The Department of the Interior generally supports the intent of S. 203, but has some concerns about how the bill would be implemented.

Executive Order 7491 of November 14, 1936, withdrew over 3,500 acres of public land in Big Horn County, Wyoming, from settlement, location, sale or entry, and reserved the lands for use by the War Department as a target range. These lands remain withdrawn and reserved under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of the Army for target range purposes, and are currently used by the Wyoming Army National Guard. The most recent review and rejustification of this withdrawal occurred in May 1984 and concluded that mining operations could not be allowed in the area because of the concerns with small arms training. S. 203 would open approximately 40 acres of this withdrawn land for bentonite mining.

The BLM has no objection to the mining of bentonite on this parcel, however, the BLM is concerned about some ambiguity in S. 203, in its current form. As written, it is not clear whether the lands will be opened to bentonite location under the 1872 Mining Law, which would require BLM to record and regulate the location of the claims. Secondly, it is unclear whether the actual mining of the bentonite will be managed by the Secretary of the Army or the BLM as the bill does not appear to return the lands to the public domain by revoking the withdrawal. We would also prefer to draw a more narrow exception for this parcel than the broad sufficiency language the bill currently provides.

Bentonite may either be a "locatable mineral" under the 1872 Mining Law or valued as a "common variety mineral" and salable under the Materials Act of 1947. The Department of the Interior recommends that language in S. 203 be modified to direct the BLM to use the authority of the Materials Act of 1947 to allow for a competitive sale of the bentonite on this parcel. The BLM currently has the authority to sell common variety bentonite off the parcel with the consent of the Department of Army, and subject to their operations. It is our understanding, however, that the bentonite on this 40 acre parcel may be of a locatable nature. Location and discovery of a valuable mineral under the 1872 Mining Law allows the claimant the right to apply for patent of the lands. While there remains in force a legislative moratorium on the issue of patents for surface lands, a locatable claim could create a future property interest in minerals that could conflict with the Department of the Army's ability to use the land. Therefore, we could not support this bill if it allows the minerals on the site to be mined in a way that would complicate any future military use of the land.

Should the withdrawal be modified or revoked, and the lands placed under BLM management by this bill, it is important that an examination of the use of the proposed withdrawn lands be completed before a decision can be made to open them to bentonite mining. Without addi-

tional statutory direction, if the proposed use is acceptable, an amendment to the existing resource management plan would need to be completed and the 40 acres of withdrawn lands placed back into the public domain. Subject to any existing 1872 Mining Law claims, the BLM might need to complete a process of opening the land in an equitable manner to all claimants.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee notes that no changes in existing law are made by the bill S. 97, as ordered reported.

