



# BLM Wyoming Rockhounding on Public Lands

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## Where is rock collection permissible?

Rockhounding is recognized as a legitimate recreational pursuit on nearly all of the 18 million acres of public land in Wyoming. These public lands administered by the BLM are open to everyone to take limited amounts of rock material for noncommercial purposes without charge. Maps showing the location of public lands in Wyoming can be obtained from this office or any BLM offices (for addresses see information handout "WYNF-0007, BLM Offices in Wyoming"). Some areas have special designations that restrict access and the type of activities allowed. For example, cave resources are federally protected and may not be altered, damaged or removed, and Abandoned Mine Lands should not be entered under any circumstance. You should check with the closest BLM field office to become familiar with local procedures, policies and areas with authorized restrictions.

## No artifacts, please

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 and the Antiquities Act of 1906 are designed to protect our nation's cultural resources. These laws prohibit the unauthorized excavation, removal, damage or alteration of any archaeological and historical site or object. Petroglyphs, human graves, old dwellings, pottery, stone tools, arrowheads and other remains of Indians and early inhabitants are protected by law because they may provide important links to our past.

## How about fossils?

Fossil collecting has its own set of rules. Vertebrate fossils (which include bones, teeth and footprints) cannot be collected, but invertebrate and plant fossils that are not of special scientific interest may be collected in **reasonable amounts** for personal use. No fossils collected from public land can be sold, traded or bartered. Please see the pamphlet titled "Fossils on America's Public Lands" available at BLM offices.

A "**reasonable amount**" refers to quantities limited to a personal hobby collection and/or home display, and obtained via surface collection or the use of nonpowered hand tools resulting in only negligible disturbance to the Earth's surface.

## May petrified wood be collected?

Collection of petrified wood is allowed but has special rules. For rockhounding purposes, you may collect up to 25 pounds of petrified wood, plus one piece, each day, not to exceed 250 pounds of petrified wood in any calendar year without a permit. You may not combine your allowance with another collector's to obtain larger pieces of petrified wood. Collections of petrified wood are for personal use, and may not be bartered or sold. Permits may be obtained from a local BLM office for collection of more than 250 pounds a year or for commercial use. Please see the "Fossils on America's Public Lands" pamphlet (P-406).

## Collected but not destroyed . . .

Explosives or power equipment is not an acceptable method of collecting minerals regardless of type addressed in

this pamphlet. Hand tools are the only acceptable method of collection. All disturbances are to be reclaimed after collection. Off-road vehicle use may also be restricted. Also, fossil and/or mineral collecting may be restricted or prohibited in some areas to allow dedication of the land for another purpose. Such restrictions follow official notice in the Federal Register and the areas are posted. Contact the local BLM field office for additional information.

### **Permits?**

Depending on the resource, the BLM grants permits or authorizations to individuals, institutions and organizations to conduct scientific research (such as research occurring at archaeological, historical and paleontological sites) or for commercial use of mineral resources. These permits/contracts are issued and administered by the BLM either at the local field offices (contracts/permits for commercial uses) or at the Wyoming State Office in Cheyenne (permits for scientific uses). Permits for scientific research are given only to individuals who hold advanced university degrees in archaeology, paleontology, or a related field, and are associated with an accredited institution.

### **Reporting archaeological or fossil sites**

All archaeological or paleontological sites, such as prehistoric campsites, buffalo jumps and fossil sites (of any kind) may be of scientific interest. The sites should be reported to the nearest BLM field office for evaluation by archaeologists or paleontologists.

### **How about gemstones?**

Semi-precious gemstones are used in jewelry-making and decorative arts. They are usually rocks that can be faceted or polished and are able to hold a shine. The private collector is welcome to take reasonable amounts of gemstone specimens, as well as common variety minerals from public lands for personal use only. However, a permit must be obtained from the BLM field office if common variety minerals are to be taken in large quantities or for resale.

### **“Locating” Gemstones**

Claims may be “located” for gemstones under the general mining laws if location requirements can be met. Collecting gemstone specimens on public land remains an accepted recreational use of the public land, however...

### **Don’t be a “Claim Jumper”**

Care must be taken not to violate the rights of a mining claimant. Patented claims are private land and permission to collect specimens on them must be obtained from the property owner. Unpatented claims, however, are still public lands and rockhounds may pursue their hobby on such lands as long as they do not interfere with mining activities or collect locatable minerals or gemstones for which the claim is located. In other words, if an unpatented claim is located for jade, rockhounds can look for and collect any mineral except jade. The claimant is entitled to the rights to the jade which is, for all practical purposes, their private property. Claimants frequently locate claims for all locatable minerals, in which case rockhounds may not collect any minerals. A claim owner may not legally charge fees for recreational use of unpatented claims. For details on patented and unpatented claims on public land, visit the closest BLM field office.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For specific information on the distribution of minerals, rocks and fossils in Wyoming, request a publication catalog from: Wyoming State Geological Survey, P.O. Box 1347, University Station, Laramie, Wyoming 82073, 307-766-2286, [www.wsgs.wyo.gov](http://www.wsgs.wyo.gov).