



Highlights of [GAO-06-614T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Chesapeake Bay Program (Bay Program) was created in 1983 when Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agreed to establish a partnership to restore the Chesapeake Bay. The partnership's most recent agreement, *Chesapeake 2000*, sets out an agenda and five broad goals to guide the restoration effort through 2010. This testimony summarizes the findings of an October 2005 GAO report (GAO-06-96) on (1) the extent to which appropriate measures for assessing restoration progress have been established, (2) the extent to which current reporting mechanisms clearly and accurately describe the bay's overall health, (3) how much funding was provided for the effort for fiscal years 1995 through 2004, and (4) how effectively the effort is being coordinated and managed.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made three recommendations in October 2005 to ensure that EPA's Chesapeake Bay Program Office completes its efforts to develop and implement an integrated assessment approach, revises its reporting approach to improve the effectiveness and credibility of its reports, and develops a comprehensive, coordinated implementation strategy that takes into account available resources. GAO is not making any new recommendations in this statement.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-614T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Anu K. Mittal at (202) 512-3841 or mittala@gao.gov.

CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM

Improved Strategies Needed to Better Guide Restoration Efforts

What GAO Found

The Bay Program had developed over 100 measures to assess progress toward meeting certain restoration commitments and providing information to guide management decisions. However, the program had not yet developed an integrated approach that would allow it to translate these individual measures into an assessment of overall progress toward achieving the five broad restoration goals outlined in *Chesapeake 2000*. For example, while the Bay Program had appropriate measures to track crab, oyster, and rockfish populations, it did not have an approach for integrating the results of these measures to assess progress toward the agreement's goal of protecting and restoring the bay's living resources. In response to GAO's recommendation, the Bay Program adopted an initial integrated approach in January 2006.

The *State of the Chesapeake Bay* reports did not provide effective and credible information on the current health status of the bay. Because these reports focused on individual trends for certain living resources and pollutants, it was not easy for the public to determine what these data collectively said about the overall health status of the bay. The credibility of these reports had been undermined because the program had commingled actual monitoring data with results of program actions and a predictive model, and the latter two tended to downplay the deteriorated conditions of the bay. Moreover, the Bay Program's reports were prepared by the same program staff who were responsible for managing the restoration effort, which led to reports that projected a rosier picture of the bay's health than may have been warranted. In response to GAO's recommendation, the program has developed a new reporting format and plans to have the new report independently assessed.

From fiscal years 1995 through 2004, the restoration effort received about \$3.7 billion in direct funding from 11 key federal agencies; the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia; and the District of Columbia. These funds were used for activities that supported water quality protection and restoration, sound land use, vital habitat protection and restoration, living resources protection and restoration, and stewardship and community engagement. During this period, the restoration effort also received an additional \$1.9 billion in funding from other federal and state programs for activities that indirectly contributed to the restoration effort.

The Bay Program did not have a comprehensive, coordinated implementation strategy to help target limited resources to those activities that would best achieve the goals outlined in *Chesapeake 2000*. Although the program had adopted 10 key commitments to focus the partners' efforts and had developed numerous planning documents, some of these documents were inconsistent with each other or were perceived as unachievable by program partners. In response to GAO's recommendation, the Bay Program is currently developing a Web-based system to unify its various planning documents and has adopted a funding priority framework. These actions, while important, fall short of the strategy recommended by GAO.