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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-976](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Military lands provide habitat for more than 300 species that must be protected under the Endangered Species Act and many other species that may become endangered. In some cases, military installations provide some of the finest remaining habitat for these species. However, Department of Defense (DOD) officials stated that protection of endangered species may result in land-use restrictions that reduce the military's flexibility to use land for training. GAO was asked to examine the (1) extent to which DOD and other nearby federal land managers in the region are managing cooperatively for endangered species affecting military training ranges and (2) factors that can limit cooperative management for endangered species on military training ranges.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretaries of Defense, the Interior, and Agriculture develop and implement an interagency strategy, a comprehensive training program, and a centralized data source for cooperative management efforts. The Departments of Defense, the Interior, and Agriculture concurred on the need to improve interagency cooperation. GAO also proposes that Congress consider requiring the agencies to jointly report annually on their efforts to manage cooperatively for endangered species affecting military training ranges.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-976.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry W. Holman at (202) 512-8412 or holmanb@gao.gov.

MILITARY TRAINING

Implementation Strategy Needed to Increase Interagency Management for Endangered Species Affecting Training Ranges

What GAO Found

DOD and other federal land managers have taken some steps to implement interagency cooperative efforts to manage endangered species on a regional basis, but the extent to which they are using this approach for military training ranges is limited. Federal land managers recognize that cooperative management of endangered species has several benefits, such as sharing land-use restrictions and resources and providing better protection for species in some cases. The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture have issued policies, and DOD has issued directives to promote cooperative management of natural resources. They have also outlined specific actions to be taken—such as identifying geographic regions for species management and forming working groups. However, follow-through on these actions has been limited, without many of the prescribed actions being implemented. A few cooperative management efforts have been taken but were generally in response to a crisis—such as a species' population declining.

The Departments of Defense, the Interior, and Agriculture have identified a number of factors that can limit cooperative management for endangered species on military training ranges. When a species is found on training ranges but is not found on other federal land or is not protected under the Endangered Species Act, neighboring land managers do not always consider management of the species a high priority. Limited interaction among agencies and limited resources to employ cooperative programs also inhibit cooperative management. Lack of training and expertise has limited federal land managers' ability to identify such opportunities. Moreover, federal agencies cannot easily share information—such as best practices and land management plans—because there is no centralized source of such information. Given that federal agencies have made little progress in implementing the various agreements for cooperative management, an interagency reporting requirement would provide a basis to hold agencies accountable for sharing endangered species management on training ranges.



Source: Departments of the Air Force (left) and the Army (right).

Numerous factors contribute to the cooperative management of species among neighboring federal land managers. The endangered Sonoran pronghorn (left) is being managed cooperatively between DOD and other federal land managers in Arizona, while DOD is managing the western sage grouse, a candidate species, (right) in Washington State on its own initiative.