



Highlights of [GAO-04-590](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the mid-1990s—and especially since September 11—the government has focused attention and resources on preventing illegal aliens, drug smugglers, and potential terrorists from entering the United States across its land borders with Mexico and Canada. The Border Patrol is responsible for protecting the nation's borders. However, a significant portion of the borderlands are federal or tribal lands managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Forest Service.

Realizing the importance of coordinating federal law enforcement efforts, GAO agreed to assess: (1) border-related law enforcement challenges for land management agencies in Arizona and Washington, (2) resources land management agencies have received to address these challenges, and (3) how the Border Patrol and land management agencies coordinate border-related law enforcement efforts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Secretaries of Homeland Security, the Interior, and Agriculture coordinate strategic and funding plans with regard to federal borderlands. DHS, the Interior, Agriculture, Justice, and the Office of Management and Budget reviewed a draft of this report and generally agreed with its findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-590.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

Agencies Need to Better Coordinate Their Strategies and Operations on Federal Lands

What GAO Found

Illegal border activities, including alien border crossings and drug smuggling, on federal and tribal lands in Arizona have been increasing since the mid- to late-1990s, creating law enforcement challenges for land management agencies. This situation poses dangers to law enforcement officers, visitors, and employees and damages fragile natural resources. Rising illegal activity on these federal lands results from the Border Patrol's strategy to deter illegal entry by concentrating resources in populated areas—thus shifting illegal traffic to more remote federal lands, where Border Patrol has placed fewer resources. Although the problem is less acute along the Canadian border, land management agency officials in Washington are concerned that as the Border Patrol increases resources in populated areas, more illegal traffic will shift to remote federal lands.

Officials from the five land management agencies believe their resource levels have not kept pace with increases in illegal border activities on their lands. Agencies have sought more federal funds to address these problems and have received varying levels of law enforcement staffing and resource increases. According to Office of Management and Budget representatives, agency funding is mission-driven. Thus, land management agencies' proposals for certain border projects have not been included in the administration's fiscal year 2005 budget because they were considered to be more in keeping with the border security mission of the Border Patrol.

At the national level, interagency coordination of strategic plans and activities among Border Patrol and land management agencies is minimal regarding the Mexican and Canadian borders. Thus, limited funds may not be used most efficiently, and the impact of one agency's actions on another agency may not be considered. As of May 2004, the Border Patrol had not issued detailed plans to ensure that interagency coordination occurs, nor had it coordinated with land management officials regarding funding for infrastructure and technology improvements. Some coordination had occurred at the field level, as officials from the various agencies had begun meeting to improve operations and to share threat assessments in Arizona.

Border Fence on Federal Lands in Arizona does not Deter Illegal Border Crossings



Source: GAO.