

Why GAO Did This Study

Harmful invasive species—nonnative plants and animals that are spreading throughout the United States—have caused billions of dollars in damage to natural areas, businesses, and consumers. In 2001, the federal government issued a National Invasive Species Management Plan to focus attention on invasive species and coordinate a national control effort involving the 20 or so federal agencies that are responsible for managing them. This report discusses the economic impacts of invasive species, implementation of the management plan, and coordination of U.S. and Canadian efforts to control invasive species, including those introduced to the Great Lakes via the ballast water of ships.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the National Invasive Species Council (1) incorporate data on the economic impacts of invasive species in developing the federal government's budget; (2) add performance-oriented goals and objectives to its updated plan; (3) give high priority to an oversight strategy for measuring progress against results-oriented goals; and (4) examine whether the council is being hampered in its implementation of the plan by the lack of specific legislation. Agencies generally agreed with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-01. To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Wood at (202) 512-6878 or Woodd@gao.gov.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Clearer Focus and Greater Commitment Needed to Effectively Manage the Problem

What GAO Found

Existing literature on the economic impacts of invasive species is of limited usefulness to decision makers, although it indicates that the effects of invasive species are significant. Most economic estimates do not consider all of the relevant effects of nonnative species or the future risks that they pose. New initiatives may prompt more comprehensive analysis that could help decision makers make better resource allocations.

While the National Invasive Species Management Plan calls for many actions that are likely to contribute to preventing and controlling invasive species in the United States, it does not clearly articulate specific long-term goals toward which the government should strive. In addition, the federal government has made little progress in implementing the actions called for by the plan.

Even with high levels of compliance, U.S. regulations have not eliminated the introduction of invasive species into the Great Lakes via the ballast water of ships. The United States and Canada are working on strengthening the existing control system, but developing stronger regulations and the technology needed to meet them will take many years. The continued introduction of invasive species could have high economic and ecological costs for the Great Lakes.

Four Invasive Species That Harm the Environment and the Economy



Asian swamp eel
Source: USGS



Mute swan
Source: USGS



Zebra mussels attached to pipe
Source: Michigan Sea Grant



Eurasian ruffe
Source: USGS