



Highlights of [GAO-06-730](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (the services) are responsible for administration and implementation of the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The act generally requires the services to develop recovery plans for endangered and threatened species—species facing extinction or likely to face extinction, respectively. Recovery plans identify threats to the species' survival and the actions needed to mitigate those threats.

Proposed amendments to the act are under consideration and GAO was asked to provide information to facilitate this effort. In April 2006, GAO issued a report providing high-level information on the extent to which recovery plans contain estimates of when species are expected to be recovered, among other things. This follow-on report provides more detailed information on the factors that affect species recovery and the importance of recovery plans in recovery efforts. For 31 species—selected because they were nearing recovery, or had significant attention devoted to them and thus would be expected to be making progress towards recovery—GAO (1) identifies factors affecting the length of time to recover the species and (2) describes the role recovery plans have played in recovering these species. The Department of the Interior agreed with the facts presented in this report. The Department of Commerce declined to comment.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-730.

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

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Many Factors Affect the Length of Time to Recover Select Species

What GAO Found

Many factors affect the length of time it takes to recover the 31 species GAO reviewed. Specifically, 19 of these species have been recently delisted (removed from the list of endangered and threatened species) or are likely to be delisted within the next 25 years either because (1) they faced a primary threat that has been or is being mitigated; (2) they were found to be more prevalent than biologists thought at the time they were listed and/or habitats have been secured for the species; or (3) they are expected to respond relatively quickly to recovery efforts because, for example, they reproduce quickly in the presence of good habitat. The remaining 12 species are much farther away from being delisted, and for some, recovery is uncertain. Some of these species are not expected to recover for many decades because they respond relatively slowly to recovery efforts, for example, because they reproduce slowly. Recovery for the remaining species is uncertain either because their habitat is difficult to protect, or because not enough is known about the threats facing the species or how to mitigate those threats.

Recovery plans have played an important role in the recovery efforts of nearly all of the species GAO reviewed by identifying many of the actions the services' biologists deemed most important to the species' recovery. The services' biologists report that these actions have contributed, at least in part, to the progress made in recovering these species. For example, recovery of the red-cockaded woodpecker is dependent on having sufficient habitat—the species nests in cavities that they peck out of old pine trees, but logging largely eliminated these trees from the woodpecker's range. The recovery plan identifies measures to protect the habitat, including land acquisition and conservation agreements with landowners, as well as steps to provide artificial nest boxes until pines mature enough to provide natural habitat for the birds. The services' biologists told us that these actions have significantly improved this species' prospects for recovery. However, for about one-half of the species GAO reviewed, actions beyond those in the recovery plans also played an important role in progress toward the species' recovery. For example, the banning of the insecticide dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1972—a year before the Endangered Species Act was enacted—has been critical to recovery of the bald eagle.