



Highlights of [GAO-03-104](#), a report to Congress included as part of GAO's Performance and Accountability Series

PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY SERIES

Department of the Interior

Why GAO Did This Report

In the 2001 performance and accountability report on the Department of the Interior (Interior), GAO identified important challenges facing the department in its management of ecosystem restoration efforts, Indian tribes, national parks, and land exchanges. The information GAO presents in this report is intended to help sustain congressional attention and a departmental focus on continuing to make progress in addressing these challenges—and others that have arisen since 2001—and ultimately overcoming them. This report is part of a special series of reports on governmentwide and agency-specific issues.

What Remains to Be Done

GAO believes that Interior should

- continue its efforts of adopting joint strategies with other entities to address excess forest fuels,
- link critical strategic goals to interim goals in restoring the South Florida ecosystem,
- continue to reform Indian trust fund management and the tribal recognition process, and
- continue to devote attention to reducing a deferred maintenance backlog and improving financial reporting.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-104.

To view the full report, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robert A. Robinson at (202) 512-3841 or robinsonr@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of the Interior has made inroads in resolving some of the challenges we previously identified. However, several challenges have not been adequately addressed, and two new challenges have emerged—a deferred maintenance backlog and weaknesses in financial reporting.

- **Better management of ecosystem restoration efforts is needed.** Interior has taken steps to better manage ecosystem restoration efforts. It has adopted the National Fire Plan, identified the resources needed to restore the South Florida ecosystem, and issued a plan to control invasive species. However, more work is needed to address the growing wildland fire threat caused by the excessive fuel buildup; complete actions to improve the South Florida ecosystem restoration effort; and establish an agencywide goal to control and eradicate invasive species.
- **Management problems persist in programs for Indians and island communities.** Interior's efforts to properly account for Indian trust funds continue to be hampered by inadequate accounting and information systems, and internal control weaknesses. Management issues also impede tribes' progress toward self-determination. Interior also has varying responsibilities to seven island communities that have long-standing financial and program management deficiencies.
- **Data-gathering and concessions reforms are needed to improve management of the national parks.** The National Park Service has received funding to start to build natural resource inventories and has hired a private firm to analyze its concession program. These are good first steps. However, better scientific information on the condition of its natural resources is needed, and persistent management problems in its concessions program still need to be addressed.
- **Management problems impede land exchanges and appraisals.** While a private contractor has studied Interior's land exchange program, concerns still exist that land exchange appraisals do not ensure the lands are appropriately valued or that the public's interest is protected.
- **Deferred maintenance backlog needs to be addressed.** Interior faces a deferred maintenance backlog of between \$8.1 billion and \$11.4 billion. The agency has issued guidance to standardize deferred maintenance estimates and repair priorities, but these efforts are new and attention will need to be paid to how they are implemented.
- **Financial management weaknesses need to be addressed.** Interior's consolidated financial statements for fiscal year 2001 received an unqualified opinion. However, the auditors identified 15 reportable internal control weaknesses; 6 of which were material weaknesses.