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Highlights

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Plan Needed to Sustain Progress in Establishing IT Investment Management Capabilities

Why GAO Did This Study

The mission of the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is to maintain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. BLM employs about 11,000 people, with information technology (IT) playing a critical role in helping BLM perform its responsibilities. The bureau estimates that it will spend about $146 million on IT initiatives in fiscal year 2003.

GAO was asked to evaluate BLM's IT investment management (ITIM) capabilities and determine the bureau's plans for improving these capabilities. GAO's evaluation was based on applying its ITIM maturity framework, which identifies critical processes for successful IT investment management.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Interior direct BLM's Director to develop and implement a plan for making ITIM improvements that is based on GAO's ITIM stage 2 and 3 critical processes; specifies measurable goals, outcomes, and needed resources; and assigns clear responsibility for tasks. Progress should be measured and reported periodically to Interior.

BLM agreed with our findings and recommendations and noted that it had begun developing a plan for making ITIM improvements in accordance with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1025.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Linda D. Koontz at (202) 512-6240 or koontzl@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

BLM has made progress in establishing its ITIM capabilities. Specifically,

- BLM has established most of the key practices associated with building an investment foundation (see table). For example, the bureau has established a board for managing IT investments, implemented processes to ensure that IT projects support business needs and meet users' requirements, and established a process for selecting IT proposals. In addition, the bureau has efforts under way to address the key practices it has not yet established.

- BLM has also initiated efforts to manage its investments as a portfolio. For example, it has established a council to support portfolio management activities and begun defining portfolio selection criteria. BLM has also begun performing postimplementation reviews to learn lessons that will help define and implement an IT investment evaluation process. However BLM's progress to date in defining practices for managing its investments as a portfolio has been limited because, according to its officials, its investment board first focused its resources on establishing the processes associated with building the IT investment management foundation.

Although BLM has made progress in developing its IT investment process, it has not yet developed a plan to guide its efforts in this area and, as a result, may not be able to successfully establish more mature ITIM processes. According to the chief information officer, this is because BLM wanted to develop an ITIM plan that is integrated with improvement plans for other IT management areas, and the results of the comprehensive assessment that were to be used as the basis for such a plan were obtained only in June 2003. BLM officials agree that this plan is necessary for guiding improvement efforts and stated their intention to develop one. Developing such a plan will help BLM sustain progress made to date.

Summary of Results for Investment Foundation Critical Processes and Key Practices

Critical process	Purpose	Percentage of key practices executed
IT investment board operation	To define and establish the governing board(s) responsible for selecting, controlling, and evaluating IT investments.	100%
IT project and system identification	To create and maintain an IT project inventory to assist in managerial decision making.	42%
IT project oversight	To regularly determine each IT project's progress toward cost and schedule milestones using established criteria and take corrective actions when milestones are not achieved.	91%
Business needs identification	To ensure that each IT project supports the organization's business needs and meets users' needs.	100%
Proposal selection	To ensure that an established, structured process is used to select new IT proposals.	83%
Total		**84%**

Source: GAO.

United States General Accounting Office