



Highlights of [GAO-03-916T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water, Committee on Environment and Public Works, United States Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Invasive species—nonnative plants and animals—have caused billions of dollars in damage to natural areas, businesses, and consumers. In 2001, the federal government issued a National Management Plan to coordinate a national control effort involving the 20 or so federal agencies that are responsible for managing invasive species. In October 2002, GAO reported on the implementation of the management plan and efforts to manage ballast water, among other things.

(Invasive Species: Clearer Focus and Greater Commitment Needed to Effectively Manage the Problem) [Oct. 2002, GAO-03-1]

This testimony discusses some of GAO's findings and recommendations in that report. It also presents the results of a subsequent GAO survey of state officials responsible for managing terrestrial and aquatic invasive species. This survey sought state perspectives on (1) the perceived gaps in existing legislation and barriers to addressing terrestrial and aquatic invasive species and (2) the federal leadership structure for addressing invasive species, as well as the integration of federal legislation on terrestrial invasive species with legislation on aquatic invasives.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-916T.

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

INVASIVE SPECIES

Federal Efforts and State Perspectives on Challenges and National Leadership

What GAO Found

In 2002, GAO reported that while the National 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. For example, it is not clear how implementing the actions in the plan will move national efforts toward outcomes such as reducing new invasive species by a specific number or reducing the spread of established species by a specific amount. Moreover, GAO found that the federal government had made little progress in implementing many of the actions called for by the plan. Reasons for the slow progress included delays in establishing teams to be responsible for guiding implementation of the planned actions, the low priority given to implementation by the National Invasive Species Council and federal agencies, and the lack of funding and staff responsible for doing the work. In addition, GAO reported that current federal efforts are not adequate to prevent the introduction of invasive species into the Great Lakes via the ballast water of ships. Although federal officials believe more should be done to protect the Great Lakes from ballast water discharges, their plans for doing so depend on the development of standards and technologies that will take many years.

More recently, state officials who responded to GAO's survey, identified a number of gaps in, or problems with, existing legislation addressing invasive species and other barriers to managing invasives. Many state officials identified a lack of legal requirements for controlling invasive species that are already established or widespread as a key gap in legislation addressing both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. State officials also often recognized ineffective standards for ballast water as a major problem in aquatics legislation. Regarding barriers to managing invasive species, state officials identified a lack of federal funding for state invasive species efforts, public education and outreach, and cost-effective control measures as major problems. State officials' opinions varied on the preferred leadership structure for managing invasive species and whether to integrate legislative authority on invasive species. Many officials indicated that specifically authorizing the National Invasive Species Council would be an effective management option and favored integrated authority, but in both cases, the margins were relatively small. State officials indicated that the possible benefits of integrated legislation would be increased coordination between federal agencies and states and an increased focus on invasive species pathways, as opposed to focusing on individual species. The possible drawbacks identified included concerns that a single piece of legislation would not be able to address all possible situations dealing with invasive species and might reduce state flexibility in addressing invasives.