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# NATURAL RESOURCES USE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE PLAN

2000-2002





# GAO'S MISSION

GAO exists to support the Congress in meeting its Constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people.

## CORE VALUES

### ACCOUNTABILITY

describes the nature of GAO's work. GAO helps the Congress oversee federal programs and operations to ensure accountability to the American people. GAO's evaluators, auditors, lawyers, economists, public policy analysts, information technology specialists, and other multidisciplinary professionals seek to enhance the economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and credibility of the federal government both in fact and in the eyes of the American people. GAO accomplishes its mission through a variety of activities, including financial audits, program reviews, investigations, legal support, and program analyses.

### INTEGRITY

describes the high standards that GAO sets for itself in the conduct of its work. GAO takes a professional, objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, nonideological, fair, and balanced approach to all of its activities. Integrity is the foundation of reputation, and GAO's approach to its work ensures both.

### RELIABILITY

describes GAO's goal for how its work is viewed by the Congress and the American public. GAO produces high-quality reports, testimony, briefings, legal opinions, and other products and services that are timely, accurate, useful, clear, and candid.

## FOREWORD

In fulfilling its mission, GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and activities; and provides analyses, options, recommendations, and other assistance to help the Congress make effective oversight, policy, and funding decisions. In this context, GAO works to continuously improve the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of the federal government through the conduct of financial audits, program reviews and evaluations, analyses, legal opinions, investigations, and other services. Most of this work is based upon original data collection and analysis.

To ensure that GAO, in serving the Congress, targets the right issues, provides balanced perspectives, and develops practical recommendations, GAO regularly consults with the Congress and maintains relationships with a variety of federal, state, academic, and professional organizations. GAO also obtains the perspectives of applicable trade groups and associations and attends professional conferences. Moreover, GAO regularly coordinates its work with that of CRS, CBO, and agency Inspector General offices. Throughout, GAO's core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability are guiding principles.

In keeping with its mission and responsibilities, GAO has developed a strategic plan that includes four strategic goals and 21 related strategic objectives. To ensure that GAO's resources are directed to achieving its goals, a separate strategic plan underlies each objective. In support of GAO's goal of providing timely, quality service to the Congress and the federal government to address current and emerging challenges to the well-being and financial security of the American people, this strategic plan describes the performance goals GAO will use in supporting congressional and federal decisionmaking on responsible stewardship of natural resources and the environment.

This plan covers a 3-year period; however, because unanticipated events may significantly affect even the best of plans, GAO's planning process allows for updating this plan to respond quickly to emerging issues. If you have questions or desire information on additional or completed work related to this strategic objective, please call or e-mail us or the contact persons listed the following pages.

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# SERVING THE CONGRESS GAO'S STRATEGIC PLAN FRAMEWORK



## MISSION

GAO exists to support the Congress in meeting its Constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people.

## GOALS

PROVIDE TIMELY, QUALITY SERVICE TO THE CONGRESS AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



TO ADDRESS CURRENT AND EMERGING CHALLENGES TO THE WELL-BEING AND FINANCIAL SECURITY OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SUPPORT THE TRANSITION



TO RESPOND TO CHANGING SECURITY THREATS AND THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE

MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF GAO



BY BEING A MODEL ORGANIZATION FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



TO A MORE RESULTS-ORIENTED AND ACCOUNTABLE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

## THEMES

**Demographics**      **Globalization**      **Quality of Life**      **Security**      **Technology**  
**Government Performance and Accountability**

## OBJECTIVES

Health care needs and financing  
 Retirement income security  
 Social safety net  
 Education/workforce issues  
 Effective system of justice  
 Community investment  
**NATURAL RESOURCES USE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION**  
 Physical infrastructure

Diffuse security threats  
 Military capabilities and readiness  
 Advancement of U.S. interests  
 Global market forces

Fiscal position of the government  
 Government financing and accountability  
 Governmentwide management reforms  
 Economy, efficiency, and effectiveness improvements in federal agencies

Client relations  
 Strategic and annual planning  
 Human capital  
 Core business and supporting processes  
 Information technology services

## CORE VALUES

**Accountability**      **Integrity**      **Reliability**

PROVIDE TIMELY,  
QUALITY SERVICE TO THE  
CONGRESS AND THE  
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



TO ADDRESS  
CURRENT AND EMERGING  
CHALLENGES TO THE  
WELL-BEING AND  
FINANCIAL SECURITY  
OF THE  
AMERICAN PEOPLE

Health care needs and financing  
Retirement income security  
Social safety net  
Education/workforce issues  
Effective system of justice  
Community investment  
**NATURAL RESOURCES USE  
AND ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION**  
Physical infrastructure

## RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The issues associated with stewardship of natural resources and the environment revolve around one principal theme: balancing the need to conserve and protect these resources for future generations with the need to use them to support economic activity for the benefit of the current generation. Maintaining a healthy planet is becoming more difficult. Although considerable progress has been made in the area of pollution control—at a cost of nearly \$2 trillion—significant problems remain. Millions of Americans live in areas with unhealthy levels of air pollution, and states continue to report widespread pollution of the nation’s rivers, lakes, and streams. While our environmental laws have served the nation well in the past, the incremental costs of further pollution reductions, such as controlling emissions from currently unregulated nonpoint sources, may be high. New approaches, as well as continued enforcement of existing laws, are needed to cost-effectively control pollution, clean up the legacy of hazardous waste sites, and address global environmental threats, without undue harm to the economy.

The federal government—as the owner and steward of a vast public estate, including parks, forests, minerals, and marine resources—experiences firsthand the need to balance conservation and use. For example, agencies are challenged to ensure an appropriate balance between demands for oil and gas development and timber harvesting with needs for recreation and fish and wildlife habitats. A related challenge is how to make federal lands more self-sufficient, ensure a fair return for resources used and services rendered, and better serve the public. Playing against this backdrop is the need to ensure secure and reliable sources of energy. How the nation addresses these challenges in the years ahead will affect future generations.

GAO’s strategic plan identifies five multiyear performance goals to support congressional and federal decisionmaking on responsible stewardship of natural resources and the environment. The following pages identify the significance of performance goals, key efforts that will be undertaken, and the potential outcomes.

### *Performance Goals*

- Assess the Costs and Outcomes of Federal Strategies for Managing Federally Owned Lands and the Adequacy of Legislative and Regulatory Guidance for Resolving Conflicts and Making Choices Among Competing Land Uses
- Assess the Impact of Energy and Environmental Policies and Regulations on the Availability of Secure and Reliable Sources of Energy
- Assess the Costs and Outcomes of Federal Pollution Control Strategies and Opportunities for More Cost-Effective Approaches
- Assess Opportunities to Improve the Management and Cleanup of Hazardous and Nuclear Waste Sites
- Assess U.S. Efforts to Address Global and International Environmental Challenges



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## *Assess the Costs and Outcomes of Federal Strategies for Managing Federally Owned Lands and the Adequacy of Legislative and Regulatory Guidance for Resolving Conflicts and Making Choices Among Competing Land Uses*

### *Significance*

Our nation is blessed with an abundance of natural resources—many of them federally owned and publicly accessible—but they are limited and exhaustible. The federal government owns 650 million acres of land, or 30 percent of the nation's total land surface, and about 3 billion acres of the Outer Continental Shelf. These lands are managed for a variety of commodity uses, such as oil and gas development and timber harvesting, as well as for noncommodity uses, including recreation, fish and wildlife habitats, and wilderness set-asides. Balancing our need to conserve and protect the lands and these resources for future generations with demands for greater use and consumption poses significant management challenges. In addition, receipts from the sale or use of these lands and resources generated roughly \$6 billion in federal revenues in fiscal year 1999. Ensuring a fair and equitable return to the public is therefore an important related issue facing the nation. How we address these challenges today will profoundly affect the viability of the nation's natural resources for generations to come.



### *Key Efforts*

Evaluate federal land management agencies' progress in addressing resource issues along ecological rather than administrative boundaries

Assess the effectiveness of the administration's \$1.4 billion economic assistance plan for the Pacific Northwest

Review the Forest Service's progress in developing and implementing a strategy to reduce wildfires in national forests

Analyze the effectiveness of federal efforts to restore the Florida Everglades

Examine the options and implications for consolidating various Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management functions and activities

Assess the Department of the Interior's efforts to deal with the estimated \$5 billion backlog in deferred maintenance at its national parks and other facilities

Evaluate the Forest Service's progress in developing a strategy that would allow the agency to collect, retain, and spend more of the revenues generated from the national forests

Analyze federal land management agencies' progress in recovering costs associated with getting a fair and equitable return from the sale or use of public resources

### *Potential Outcomes*

A basis for an informed debate and alternatives to help decisionmakers make difficult choices on how to balance production, revenue generation, and the protection of natural resources

Fact-based, balanced information to aid the Congress in streamlining and reorganizing federal land management agencies to achieve greater efficiencies, make parks self-sufficient, save taxpayers money, and better serve the public

Improvements at federal land management agencies that will enable them to better meet the public's increasing desires and needs for access to and use of the nation's parks and forests while at the same time preserving and protecting the resources and surrounding environment

Increased revenues to cover the costs of operating and maintaining the nation's parks and forests, ensure a fair return for the use of public resources, and move toward greater self-sufficiency



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## *Assess the Impact of Energy and Environmental Policies and Regulations on the Availability of Secure and Reliable Sources of Energy*

### *Significance*

Americans depend on the benefits of energy, but there are complex underlying relationships between its production and use, its impact on the environment and economy, and its role in establishing and maintaining our quality of life. Efforts to achieve an appropriate balance between energy policy goals and environmental and economic goals in the 21st century will require focusing attention on such issues as restructuring the electric utility industry, complying with clean air requirements, and adapting to global energy markets. These issues raise questions about what role some of our current energy sources, such as nuclear power and coal, will have in the future.



### *Key Efforts*

Assess the impact of deregulating the electric utility industry on federal hydropower facilities and the power marketing administrations

Evaluate the implications of energy deregulation on energy technologies, the environment, and energy security

Assess the impact of environmental requirements on the costs, viability, and generating capacities of nuclear, coal, hydroelectric, and other renewable energy systems

Evaluate the impact of the change to risk-informed regulation on the safety and economic competitiveness of U.S. nuclear power plants in a deregulated electricity industry

### *Potential Outcomes*

Objective information to help decisionmakers better understand the impact of national energy policies and regulations, including the costs and benefits of further deregulation initiatives and of subsidy programs and the role of nuclear power and renewable energy sources in the nation's future electricity supply

More informed consideration of the environmental and economic implications of the nation's energy security, conservation, and climate change initiatives and more objective data to assist in determining the level of funding that is needed and appropriate for these initiatives



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## *Assess the Costs and Outcomes of Federal Pollution Control Strategies and Opportunities for More Cost-Effective Approaches*

### *Significance*

During the last three decades, the nation has worked hard to resolve a host of environmental problems that can affect Americans' quality of life and, in the process, has made a significant financial commitment to protecting the environment. EPA estimates that from 1972 through 2000, all sectors will have expended approximately \$2 trillion to control pollution. It also projects a continuing upward trend in environmental compliance costs, annually amounting to about \$148 billion in 2000. Impressive environmental gains have been made. However, achieving further improvements will be a complex challenge. They will require balancing the environmental, economic, and social requirements of both current and future generations. These issues will require all sectors to give greater attention to performance and cost in implementing innovative, flexible, and cost-effective solutions. Unhealthy levels of air pollution; environmental releases of millions of tons of toxic chemicals; widespread pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams; agricultural and nonagricultural exposures to pesticides; and impact on the environment of changing population patterns and economic growth are also continuing concerns. Many current and emerging environmental problems present significant labor productivity and human health costs. For example, a growing area of concern is environmental threats to children's health, ranging from lead poisoning to toxic chemicals to asthma-inducing air pollution. The Congress will need to focus on these complex issues when it considers reauthorizing major statutes—including the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Safe Drinking Water acts—which affect every American.



### *Key Efforts*

Examine EPA's implementation of the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act

Assess current approaches and study future options for improving the quality of the nation's surface waters

Assess EPA's implementation of the 1996 amendments to the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act

Evaluate EPA's use of alternative regulatory and pollution control strategies—including emissions trading—to achieve more protection at lower cost

### *Potential Outcomes*

Congressional use of information, analyses, and recommendations in deliberating the reauthorization and oversight of key environmental laws, including the Clean Air, Clean Water, and Safe Drinking Water acts

Objective information provided to aid in congressional oversight of EPA's implementation of the 1996 FIFRA amendments

Administrative actions to develop alternative regulatory and pollution control approaches to more effectively protect the environment





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## *Assess Opportunities to Improve the Management and Cleanup of Hazardous and Nuclear Waste Sites*

### *Significance*

Nuclear and hazardous waste sites present serious environmental problems that will continue to pose major financial and management challenges for the United States well into the 21st century. Past waste management and disposal practices have allowed hazardous substances to seep into the land and water at thousands of federally and privately owned hazardous waste sites. These problems affect virtually every state and present notable risks to the environment and human health. For example, according to estimates, about 60 million people in the United States live within 4 miles of a hazardous waste site. After two decades of cleanup, as of March 1999, EPA's Superfund program still included hundreds of seriously contaminated sites requiring cleanup and 3,000 or more additional sites potentially eligible for priority cleanup. To date, financial expenditures for cleanups have been substantial. For example, the Superfund program has spent over \$14 billion to address health and environmental threats from private hazardous waste sites and continues to spend nearly \$2 billion a year on various cleanup programs. DOE spends nearly \$6 billion a year to remove and dispose of nuclear wastes, and DOD, whose annual environmental expenditures total over \$4 billion, spends about \$2 billion a year on hazardous waste cleanup activities. Cleaning up the nation's nuclear, ordnance, and hazardous waste sites could ultimately cost the federal government about \$300 billion and the private sector hundreds of billions more. While progress has been made, the magnitude of the nation's remaining hazardous waste problem is substantial and calls for the more efficient use of funds to protect the environment and the public. Ongoing problems place the federal financial investment at risk and make it vulnerable to waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement. Challenges include more effectively allocating federal resources to the cleanup sites posing the most significant threats, obtaining reimbursement from private responsible parties for a larger percentage of cleanup costs, and adequately controlling the costs of contractors who perform or manage federal cleanup activities. In reauthorizing key statutes, the Congress will need to consider whether existing federal programs, including EPA's multibillion-dollar Superfund program, are structured appropriately to accomplish their cleanup objectives and what the future direction of such programs should be.



### *Key Efforts*

Analyze EPA's progress in identifying hazardous waste sites requiring cleanup, establishing cleanup priorities, allocating resources, and addressing management problems in both the Superfund and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act programs

Assess DOE's, DOD's, EPA's progress in cost-effectively cleaning up and closing nuclear, ordnance, and hazardous waste sites while protecting workers and the public

Assess DOE's efforts to integrate cleanup and storage activities at its nuclear waste sites

### *Potential Outcomes*

Information for an informed debate on the issues associated with hazardous site identification, cleanup priorities, resource allocation, and program management to aid in congressional deliberations over the reauthorization of EPA's Superfund and RCRA programs

More effective management of cleanup activities by DOE, DOD, and EPA

Integration of nuclear waste storage and disposal activities

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## *U.S. Efforts to Address Global and International Environmental Challenges*

### *Significance*

Global environmental issues, such as ozone depletion, critical habitat loss, deforestation, and climate change, are complex problems that transcend national borders. Over the past two decades, a better understanding of the environment and the global nature of environmental problems has led the United States and other nations to enter into over 170 environmental agreements. Within the United States, there is concern that adhering to the principles of various negotiated international environmental protocols may harm the United States economically and reduce its competitiveness in world markets if other nations do not similarly embrace their obligations. Achieving desired environmental outcomes is complex because it requires a strong commitment among many nations with varying levels of industrial development, technical capabilities, and resources. Ensuring that signatories comply with environmental treaties is a major problem, although little consensus and limited experience exist concerning the most effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. While some scientific controversy exists, concerns are being expressed more often, both domestically and internationally, about the increasing levels of worldwide emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. There is substantial agreement in the scientific community that these increases in emissions could lead to global warming, which in future decades could result in wide-ranging and significant adverse effects. For example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently projected a 3.5-degree increase in globally averaged surface temperature by the year 2100, which it reports may result in significant adverse effects. Over the next 3 years, global climate change is likely to be a pressing issue for the Congress and the administration. In 1997, the United States and other developed nations agreed to strengthen an earlier international agreement to limit their emissions of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide. Although the United States has not ratified the 1997 agreement, the administration has sought billions of additional dollars to reduce U.S. emissions.



### *Key Efforts*

Assess emerging global and international environmental issues and study options for developing and implementing international environmental agreements that may address the issues identified and support U.S. interests

Analyze issues concerning global climate change and potential U.S. response strategies

### *Potential Outcomes*

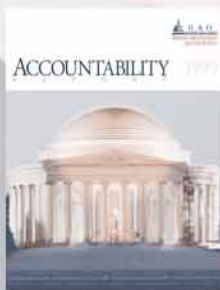
Support for congressional and administrative decisionmakers' reviews on ways to best address international environmental issues and enhance oversight and enforcement of domestic and international compliance with international agreements targeted at achieving improved environmental conditions

Information and analysis to assist the Congress and federal agencies as they debate alternatives for developing and implementing cost-effective policies and devise strategies for combating the economic, social, and environmental effects of climate change

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CONTACT FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: Peter Guerrero, Director, Environmental Protection Issues, (202) 512-6111, [guerrerop.rced@gao.gov](mailto:guerrerop.rced@gao.gov)

*The full set of GAO's strategic planning, performance, and accountability documents are listed below. All of these documents, as well as other GAO reports and documents, may be obtained electronically on our website, [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov).*



**Accountability Report for fiscal year 1999**

**Strategic Plan, 2000-2005**

*Strategic Plan Executive Summary*

*Strategic Plan Framework*

**Strategic Objective Plans**

*Health Care Needs and Financing*

*Retirement Income Security*

*Social Safety Net*

*Education/Workforce Issues*

*Effective System of Justice*

*Community Investment*

*Natural Resources Use and Environmental Protection*

*Physical Infrastructure*

*Diffuse Security Threats*

*Military Capabilities and Readiness*

*Advancement of U.S. Interests*

*Global Market Forces*

*Fiscal Position of the Government*

*Government Financing and Accountability*

*Governmentwide Management Reforms*

*Economy, Efficiency, and Effectiveness*

*Improvements in Federal Agencies*

*Maximize the Value of GAO*

**Performance Plan Fiscal Year 2001**



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2000-2002