



Highlights of [GAO-12-691T](#), a statement before the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government manages about 650 million acres, or 29 percent, of the 2.27 billion acres of U.S. land. Four land management agencies—the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the National Park Service (NPS) in the Department of the Interior (Interior), and the Forest Service, in the Department of Agriculture—manage about 95 percent of these federal acres. Interior's Bureau of Reclamation (BoR) manages another 1 percent of these acres. The five agencies collect certain data to help manage federal lands under their jurisdiction.

This testimony summarizes GAO's findings from [GAO-11-337](#), a report issued in April 2011. In this report, GAO reviewed the extent to which the five agencies collect certain federal land and resource data (referred to as data elements), how these data elements are stored, and their potential reliability. GAO included over 100 data elements at each agency in its analysis. These elements can be categorized as information on (1) federal land and the resources the five agencies manage, (2) revenues generated from selected activities on these lands, and (3) federal land subject to selected land use designations, such as wilderness areas.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made no recommendation in its 2011 report and is making no new recommendations in this testimony.

May 3, 2012

FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT

Availability and Potential Reliability of Selected Data Elements at Five Agencies

What GAO Found

The five agencies varied in the extent to which they collected the over 100 land and resources, revenue, and federal land use designation data elements that GAO asked them about. Specifically, all five agencies collected data on four basic data elements, which related to total surface acres managed, total acres managed within each state, the number of special use permits generated for filming activities on federal land, and the number of cultural and historic sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In contrast, none of them collected information for 33 other data elements, such as the percent of total acres under oil, gas, or coal leases that have surface disturbance or where the surface disturbance has been reclaimed, or information on the potential quantities of oil, gas, and coal resources on federal land. Agency officials cited various reasons why the agencies did not collect certain information, such as believing another federal agency collected it, it was inconsistent with the agency's mission, or they lacked the authority or resources to do so.

When an agency collected information, it was usually stored in a primary agency data system—a centralized electronic data system maintained at an agencywide level. For example, GAO queried each agency about 57 federal land and resources data elements, and while the number of data elements each agency collected varied significantly, ranging from 3 to 22, the majority of the information that was collected was stored in a primary agency data system. Similarly, GAO asked each agency about 35 specific revenue data elements, and again while the number of data elements each agency collected varied significantly, ranging from 6 to 22, the majority of the information that was collected was stored in a primary agency data system. When the agencies collected information but did not store it in a primary agency data system, it was available in other formats such as paper files, land use plans, or other agency documents and files that may have been located in multiple field locations.

GAO assessed the potential reliability of the data elements that the five agencies collected and determined that less than half of the data elements stored in a primary agency data system were potentially reliable. Generally, data elements were assessed as potentially reliable when information about the completeness and accuracy of a specific data element provided high assurance of its reliability. It is important to note that GAO assessed the potential reliability of these data elements for a given period of time, and additional analysis would be needed to determine the reliability of specific data elements for specific purposes. Among the reasons some of these data were assessed to be potentially unreliable were insufficient information about the accuracy and completeness of data elements and lack of internal controls for data quality.

View [GAO-12-691T](#). For more information, contact Anu K. Mittal at (202) 512-3841 or mittala@gao.gov.