



Highlights of [GAO-08-1033T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Chesapeake Bay Program (Bay Program) was created in 1983 when Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, the District of Columbia, the Chesapeake Bay Commission, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agreed to establish a partnership to restore the Bay. The partnership's most recent agreement, *Chesapeake 2000*, sets out five broad goals to guide the restoration effort through 2010. This testimony summarizes the findings of an October 2005 GAO report (GAO-06-96) on (1) the extent to which measures for assessing restoration progress had been established, (2) the extent to which program reports clearly and accurately described the bay's health, (3) how much funding was provided for the effort for fiscal years 1995 to 2004, and (4) how effectively the effort was being coordinated and managed. It also summarizes actions taken by the program in response to GAO's recommendations. GAO reviewed the program's 2008 report to Congress and discussed recent actions with program officials.

What GAO Recommends

In 2005, GAO recommended that the Bay Program complete efforts to develop and implement an integrated approach, revise its reports to improve their effectiveness and credibility, and develop a comprehensive, coordinated implementation strategy that takes into account available resources. GAO is not making new recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1033T](#). For more information, contact Anu Mittal, (202) 512-3841, mittala@gao.gov.

CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM

Recent Actions Are Positive Steps Toward More Effectively Guiding the Restoration Effort

What GAO Found

In 2005, GAO found that the Bay Program had over 100 measures to assess progress toward meeting some restoration commitments and guide program management. However, the program had not developed an integrated approach that would translate these individual measures into an assessment of progress toward achieving the restoration goals outlined in *Chesapeake 2000*. For example, while the program had appropriate measures to track crab, oyster, and rockfish populations, it did not have an approach for integrating the results of these measures to assess progress toward its goal of protecting and restoring the bay's living resources. In response to GAO's recommendation, the Bay Program has integrated key measures into 3 indices of bay health and 5 indices of restoration progress.

In 2005, the reports used by the Bay Program did not provide effective and credible information on the health status of the bay. Instead, these reports focused on individual trends for certain living resources and pollutants, and did not effectively communicate the overall health status of the bay. These reports were also not credible because actual monitoring data had been commingled with the results of program actions and a predictive model, and the latter two tended to downplay the deteriorated conditions of the bay. Moreover, the reports lacked independence, which led to rosier projections of the bay's health than may have been warranted. In response to GAO's recommendations, the Bay Program developed a new report format and has tried to enhance the independence of the reporting process. However, the new process does not adequately address GAO's concerns about independence.

From fiscal years 1995 through 2004, the restoration effort received about \$3.7 billion in direct funding from 11 key federal agencies; the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia; and the District of Columbia. These funds were used for activities that supported water quality protection and restoration, sound land use, vital habitat protection and restoration, living resources protection and restoration, and stewardship and community engagement. During this period, the restoration effort also received an additional \$1.9 billion in funding from federal and state programs for activities that indirectly contribute to the restoration effort.

In 2005, the Bay Program did not have a comprehensive, coordinated implementation strategy to help target limited resources to those activities that would best achieve the goals outlined in *Chesapeake 2000*. The program was focusing on 10 key commitments and had developed numerous planning documents, but some of these documents were inconsistent with each other or were perceived as unachievable by the partners. In response to GAO's recommendations, the Bay Program has taken several actions, such as developing a strategic framework to unify planning documents and identify how it will pursue its goals. While these actions are positive steps, additional actions are needed before the program has the comprehensive, coordinated implementation strategy recommended by GAO.