



Highlights of [GAO-03-615](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

For several decades, debate over how to balance timber sales with resource protection and recreational use on federally managed lands has been at the heart of controversy surrounding federal land management. The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is one of the federal agencies that manages some of the nation's forests—about 53 million acres—under its public domain forestry management program and offers timber for sale from these lands.

With regard to BLM's offerings of timber for sale, congressional requesters asked GAO to determine (1) the statutory framework for BLM timber sales, (2) the trend in BLM timber volume offered for sale, and (3) factors contributing to any observed trends.

GAO reviewed laws, regulations, and BLM policy governing BLM timber sales. GAO obtained and reviewed data on the volumes and composition of BLM timber sale offerings from fiscal years 1990 through 2002 and met with agency officials and others to identify factors affecting timber sale offering trends and their importance.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-615.

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.

BLM PUBLIC DOMAIN LANDS

Volume of Timber Offered for Sale Has Declined Substantially Since Fiscal Year 1990

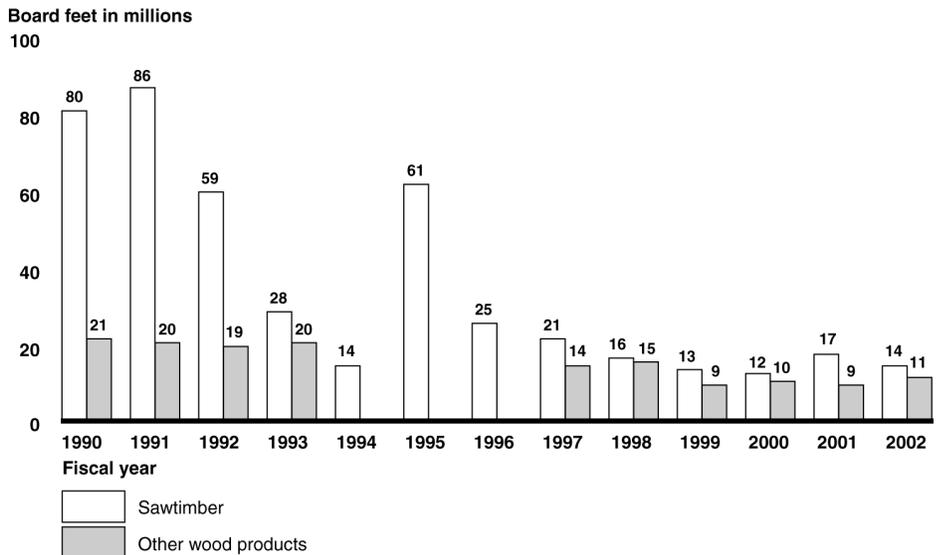
What GAO Found

A variety of land management and other environmental laws provide the statutory framework for timber sales on BLM public domain land. In particular, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act permits timber sales as one of several uses for BLM public lands. Timber sales also must comply with other environmental laws, such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Clean Water Act.

From 1990 to 2002, the volume of timber offered for sale by BLM declined about 74 percent. Declines were experienced for each of the timber's components—sawtimber (trees or logs suitable for conversion into lumber) and other wood products (small logs used to make firewood, posts, and poles). Consequently, in 2002, the proportion of sawtimber in the total volume offered for sale was less than it was in 1990.

The principal factor contributing to the decline in timber volume was the governmentwide shift in forestry program emphasis beginning in the late 1980s from timber production to enhancing forest ecosystem health. This shift was based on the need to provide more protection for nontimber resources and to place a greater emphasis on the removal of smaller trees to reduce the risks of insects, fire, and disease. As a result, according to BLM officials, timber became a by-product rather than the focus of BLM's management of its public domain forests.

BLM Public Domain Timber Offered for Sale by Type, Fiscal Years 1990 through 2002



Source: BLM.

Note: BLM could not provide volume data for other wood products for fiscal years 1994 through 1996.