

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-226T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government collects, maintains, and uses geospatial information—information linked to specific geographic locations—to support many functions, including national security and disaster response. In 2012, the Department of the Interior estimated that the federal government was investing billions of dollars on geospatial data annually, and that duplication was common.

In November 2012, GAO reported on efforts to reduce duplicative investments in geospatial data, focusing on OMB, FGDC, and three agencies: the Departments of Commerce, the Interior, and Transportation.

This statement summarizes the results of that November 2012 report on progress and challenges in coordinating geospatial information and includes updates on the implementation of recommendations made in that report.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making no new recommendations in this statement. In November 2012, GAO recommended that to improve coordination and reduce duplication, FGDC develop a national strategy for coordinating geospatial investments; federal agencies follow federal guidance for managing geospatial investments; and OMB develop a mechanism to identify and report on geospatial investments. Since that time, FGDC and several agencies have taken some steps to implement the recommendations. However, additional actions are still needed.

View [GAO-14-226T](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

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GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION

OMB and Agencies Can Reduce Duplication by Making Coordination a Priority

What GAO Found

The President and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have established policies and procedures for coordinating investments in geospatial data, however, in November 2012, GAO reported that governmentwide committees and federal departments and agencies had not effectively implemented them. The committee that was established to promote the coordination of geospatial data nationwide—the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC)—had developed and endorsed key standards and had established a clearinghouse of metadata. GAO found that the clearinghouse was not being used by agencies to identify planned geospatial investments to promote coordination and reduce duplication. In addition, the committee had not yet fully planned for or implemented an approach to manage geospatial data as related groups of investments to allow agencies to more effectively plan geospatial data collection efforts and minimize duplicative investments, and its strategic plan was missing key elements.

Other shortfalls have impaired progress in coordinating geospatial data. Specifically, none of the three federal departments in GAO's review had fully implemented important activities such as preparing and implementing a strategy for advancing geospatial activities within their respective departments (see table). Moreover, the agencies in GAO's review responsible for governmentwide management of specific geospatial data had implemented some but not all key activities for coordinating the national coverage of specific geospatial data.

Status of Federal Departments' Implementation of Geospatial Activities, as of November 2012

Activity	Commerce	Interior	Transportation
Designate a senior official with departmentwide responsibility	●	●	●
Prepare and implement a strategy	○	○	○
Develop a policy for metadata	●	○	○
Make metadata available on clearinghouse	●	●	●
Adopt procedures for accessing clearinghouse	○	○	○

● = Fully met ● = Partially met ○ = Not met

Source: GAO analysis of agency documentation.

While OMB has oversight responsibilities for geospatial data, GAO reported in November 2012 that according to OMB staff, the agency did not have complete and reliable information to identify potentially duplicative geospatial investments. GAO also reported that FGDC, federal departments and agencies, and OMB had not yet fully implemented policies and procedures for coordinating geospatial investments because these efforts had not been a priority. As a result, efforts to acquire data were uncoordinated and the federal government acquired duplicative geospatial data. For example, a National Geospatial Advisory Committee representative stated that a commercial provider leases the same proprietary parcel data to six federal agencies. GAO concluded that unless the key entities determined that coordinating geospatial investments was a priority, the federal government would continue to acquire duplicative geospatial information and waste taxpayer dollars.