Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government collects, maintains, and uses geospatial information—data linked to specific geographic locations—to help support varied missions, including national security and natural resources conservation. To coordinate geospatial activities, in 1994 the President issued an executive order to develop a National Spatial Data Infrastructure—a framework for coordination that includes standards, data themes, and a clearinghouse. GAO was asked to review federal and state coordination of geospatial data.

GAO’s objectives were to (1) describe the geospatial data that selected federal agencies and states use and how much is spent on geospatial data; (2) assess progress in establishing the National Spatial Data Infrastructure; and (3) determine whether selected federal agencies and states invest in duplicative geospatial data. To do so, GAO identified federal and state uses of geospatial data; evaluated available cost data from 2013 to 2015; assessed FGDC’s and selected agencies’ efforts to establish the infrastructure; and analyzed federal and state datasets to identify duplication.

What GAO Recommends

GAO suggests that Congress consider assessing statutory limitations on address data to foster progress toward a national address database. GAO also recommends that OMB improve its oversight of FGDC and federal agency initiatives, and that FGDC and selected agencies fully implement initiatives. The agencies generally agreed with the recommendations and identified plans to implement them.

View GAO-15-193. For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.