GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE

Some Information on Projects and Progress Made Available to Congress and the Public

What GAO Found

As GAO reported in July 2015, of the $1.68 billion in federal funds made available for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) in fiscal years 2010 through 2014, nearly all had been allocated as of January 2015. Of the $1.66 billion allocated, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the other 10 Great Lakes Interagency Task Force (Task Force) agencies expended $1.15 billion for 2,123 projects (see fig.).

Status of GLRI Funds, FY 2010-2014

Task Force agencies can either conduct work themselves or enter into financial agreements, such as grants, cooperative agreements, or contracts with others, such as federal entities; state, local, and tribal entities; nongovernmental organizations; and academic institutions. To guide restoration work, EPA and the Task Force have developed two consecutive multiyear restoration action plans. EPA also created a process to ensure monitoring and reporting on the progress of the GLRI, and EPA and the Task Force issued three accomplishment reports.

The process to identify each agency’s GLRI work and funding has evolved to emphasize interagency discussion. In fiscal year 2012, the Task Force created subgroups to discuss and identify work on three issues: cleaning up severely degraded locations, called Areas of Concern; preventing and controlling invasive, aquatic species that cause extensive ecological and economic damage; and reducing nutrient runoff from agricultural areas. EPA officials said that the Task Force created additional subgroups to identify all GLRI work and funding in 2015.

In July 2015, GAO found that the Task Force has made some information about GLRI project activities and results available to Congress and the public in three accomplishment reports and on its website. For the 2015 report, GAO reviewed a sample of 19 GLRI projects funded by the five Task Force agencies that received the majority of GLRI funds, among other things.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended in 2013 that EPA improve assessments of GLRI progress, among other things. EPA agreed and has taken several actions. GAO is not making any recommendations in this testimony.

View GAO-15-841T. For more information, contact J. Alfredo Gómez at (202) 512-3841 or gomezj@gao.gov.