



February 2018

# WILDLIFE AND SPORT FISH RESTORATION

## Competitive Grant Programs Managed Consistently with Relevant Regulations, but Monitoring Could Be Improved

Accessible Version

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-303](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

FWS awarded \$1.5 billion in grants in fiscal year 2016, which represented about half of the agency's budget. In general, FWS awards two types of grants: (1) formula grants, which are distributed to recipients based on a required formula, and (2) competitive grants, where potential recipients submit an application for funding that is reviewed and scored against criteria. Within FWS, WSFR manages several grant programs.

GAO was asked to review WSFR's management of its competitive grant programs. This report (1) identifies and describes competitive grant programs that WSFR awards and monitors; (2) examines how WSFR awards grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant regulations; and (3) examines how WSFR monitors grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant regulations. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and FWS guidance; analyzed agency data for fiscal years 2012-2016; reviewed award documents for fiscal year 2016 and a sample of monitoring documents for grants awarded in fiscal year 2015 (selected to ensure sufficient time for required reports to be submitted) and compared these with requirements from relevant regulations; interviewed WSFR headquarters and regional officials and grant recipients.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FWS develop a template or other standardized method to facilitate collection of all required information for grant performance reports. The Department of the Interior concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-18-303](#). For more information, contact Anne-Marie Fennell at (202) 512-3841 or [fennella@gao.gov](mailto:fennella@gao.gov).

February 2018

## WILDLIFE AND SPORT FISH RESTORATION

### Competitive Grant Programs Managed Consistently with Relevant Regulations, but Monitoring Could Be Improved

## What GAO Found

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) program, within the Department of the Interior, awards and monitors five competitive grant programs. These grant programs fund different types of projects ranging from building docks to acquiring wetlands. GAO found that the number of grants and funding awarded varied by grant program from fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

**Total Number of Grants and Federal Funding Awarded for Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Competitive Grant Programs, Fiscal Years 2012-2016<sup>a</sup>**

Dollars in thousands

Boating Infrastructure Tier 2		Clean Vessel Act		Competitive State Wildlife		Multistate Conservation		National Coastal Wetlands Conservation	
Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded
69	\$51,459	149	\$67,646	122	\$24,235	78	\$26,375	120	\$94,369

Source: GAO analysis of Dept. of the Interior's Financial and Business Management System data. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>Data show awards and funding in the fiscal year in which funds were initially obligated to recipients.

The award process WSFR uses for the five competitive grant programs generally involves publicly announcing the grant opportunity through a Notice of Funding Opportunity, which contains information applicants need to consider when applying, such as available funding and criteria that will be used to score applications. A panel comprised of WSFR staff, and in some cases other FWS staff or a third party organization, reviews and scores the applications based on the criteria in the Notice of Funding Opportunity and develops a list of recommended projects and funding amounts. The list is forwarded to the Director of FWS for review and approval. GAO found that WSFR's grant award process is consistent with federal regulations for awarding federal grants.

WSFR monitors its competitive grants by reviewing financial and performance reports submitted by grant recipients. In general, this process is consistent with relevant regulations, but some of the performance reports were missing required information. Specifically, for fiscal year 2015 grants GAO reviewed, financial and performance reports were generally submitted on time by grant recipients, but several performance reports (9 of 51) did not include a comparison of actual accomplishments to the goals of the grant, as required by regulations. WSFR does not have a template for grant recipients to follow in preparing these reports for most of the grant programs, and the template used by one region does not clearly ask for all required information. WSFR officials have said the agency plans to develop a more standardized reporting process but no timeline has been established. According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, management should design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks, including designing mechanisms to help monitor performance. Without a template or standardized method that facilitates the collection of performance information, WSFR grant recipients may continue to submit performance reports that are missing information needed by FWS to monitor its competitive grant programs.

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**Abbreviations**

AFWA	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Interior	Department of the Interior
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunity
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OIG	Office of Inspector General
Uniform Guidance	Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
WSFR	Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration

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February 22, 2018

The Honorable Trey Gowdy  
Chairman  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Rob Bishop  
Chairman  
Committee on Natural Resources  
House of Representatives

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), within the Department of the Interior (Interior), awarded \$1.5 billion in grants in fiscal year 2016, which represented about 50 percent of the FWS budget. In general, FWS awards two types of grants: (1) formula grants, which are distributed to recipients based on a required formula, and (2) competitive grants, where potential recipients submit an application for funding that is reviewed and scored against criteria. Within FWS, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) Program is responsible for managing several of the agency's grant programs, including two formula grant programs—the Wildlife Restoration Program and the Sport Fish Restoration Program.<sup>1</sup> In addition, WSFR awards and monitors several competitive grants to recipients, which include state agencies and nongovernmental organizations. In fiscal year 2016, WSFR awarded about \$54 million in these competitive grants. Competitive grant programs provide support for various activities, such as helping to construct boat docks or acquiring wetlands, and these grants are awarded annually.

Our prior work has highlighted the importance of both awarding competitive grants in a fair and transparent way and monitoring federal

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<sup>1</sup>The formula for the Wildlife Restoration Program is based on the number of paid hunting license holders in a state along with its land area, which includes inland water area. The formula for the Sport Fish Restoration Program is based on the number of paid fishing license holders in a state along with its land and water area, which includes inland and coastal water areas. In both programs, there are caps on the maximum amount of funding that a state can receive and floors on the minimum amount of funding a state can receive. Funding is also available to American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. For the purposes of this report, we use the term "state" to refer to these entities as well.

grants.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has taken actions to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of grant-making across the federal government. Specifically, in 2011, OMB created the Council on Financial Assistance Reform, an interagency council charged with providing policy-level leadership for the grants community and supporting reforms to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of federal grants.<sup>3</sup> Further, in December 2014, OMB's *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards* (Uniform Guidance) became effective for new grant awards after being adopted by federal grant-making agencies, including Interior.<sup>4</sup> The Uniform Guidance requires, among other things, that federal agencies design and execute a merit review process for competitive grant applications.<sup>5</sup> A merit review process is characterized by the establishment of criteria applied by the agency to evaluate the merit of competitive grant applications and seeks to ensure that grant applications are reviewed in a fair, competitive, and transparent manner. The Uniform Guidance also requires certain monitoring activities for federal grants, such as requiring grant recipients to submit financial and performance reports.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Grants Management: Selected Agencies Could Clarify Merit-Based Award Criteria and Provide Guidance for Reviewing Potentially Duplicative Awards*, [GAO-17-113](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 12, 2017); GAO, *Grants Management: EPA Could Improve Certain Monitoring Practices*, [GAO-16-530](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2016).

<sup>3</sup>In June 2017, OMB disbanded the Council on Financial Assistance Reform and said that financial assistance priorities will be considered by the Chief Financial Officers Council. OMB, *Reducing Burden for Federal Agencies by Rescinding and Modifying OMB Memoranda*, M-17-26 (June 15, 2017).

<sup>4</sup>9 Fed. Reg. 75,867 (Dec. 19, 2014) (joint interim final rule implementing OMB's final Uniform Guidance); 78 Fed. Reg. 78,590 (Dec. 26, 2013) (OMB's final Uniform Guidance) (codified as amended at 2 C.F.R. pt. 200). The Uniform Guidance consolidated eight OMB grants management circulars, including A-21, *Cost Principles for Educational Institutions*; A-50, *Audit Follow-up* (specifically the guidance on Single Audit Act follow-up); A-87, *Cost Principles for State, Local and Indian Tribal Governments*; A-89, *Federal Domestic Assistance Program Information*; A-102, *Grants and Cooperative Agreements with State and Local Governments*; A-110, *Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements With Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, and Other Non-Profit Organizations*; A-122, *Cost Principles for Non-Profit Organizations*; and A-133, *Audits of States, Local Governments and Non-Profit Organizations*.

<sup>5</sup>2 C.F.R. § 200.204.

<sup>6</sup>See 2 C.F.R. §§ 200.327 (financial reporting), 200.328 (performance reporting).

You asked us to review WSFR's management of its competitive grant programs. This report (1) identifies and describes the competitive grant programs that WSFR awards and monitors; (2) examines how WSFR awards grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant regulations; and (3) examines how WSFR monitors grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant regulations.

To identify the competitive grant programs that WSFR both awards and monitors, we reviewed federal laws, regulations, agency guidance, budget documents, and grant program descriptions in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, which is a compilation of federal assistance programs including grants. We developed a list of competitive grant programs that WSFR awards and monitors and corroborated the list with WSFR officials. We also analyzed data on these grant programs from Interior's Financial and Business Management System for fiscal years 2012 through 2016, the most recent five-year period for when the award process had been completed. To determine the reliability of these data, we interviewed agency officials and conducted electronic testing of the data, and we determined the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes.

To examine how WSFR awards competitive grants and how this compares with relevant regulations, we reviewed agency regulations and guidance along with the Uniform Guidance. We also reviewed award documents for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle for the competitive grant programs we identified. These documents included the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), which describes the funding opportunity to applicants; documentation of the scoring of applications; and memos that documented the results of the scoring process. We also reviewed eight complete grant files for grants awarded in 2016. In addition to looking at these fiscal year 2016 documents, we also examined memos that documented the results of the award process for the grants awarded in fiscal years 2012 through 2015. To assess the extent to which the award process is consistent with relevant regulations, we compared the process WSFR uses to award grants with OMB's Uniform Guidance.

To examine how WSFR monitors competitive grants and how this compares with relevant regulations, we reviewed agency regulations and guidance along with the Uniform Guidance. We also examined financial and performance reports for 32 selected grants awarded in fiscal year 2015. We selected fiscal year 2015 to ensure that enough time had elapsed under these grants for financial and performance reports to have

been required and submitted. In selecting this non-probability sample of files, we ensured that we had at least one file for each of the grant programs in our review and at least one file from each of the eight FWS regional offices. The results from our analysis of these documents are not generalizable to all monitoring documents for grants awarded in fiscal year 2015, but allowed us to examine how WSFR monitored selected grants. To assess the extent to which the monitoring process is consistent with relevant regulations, we compared the process WSFR uses to monitor grants with OMB's Uniform Guidance.

For all three objectives, we interviewed WSFR staff responsible for overseeing WSFR grant programs, including program leaders for the competitive grant programs at headquarters and WSFR staff in each of the eight FWS regional offices. We asked these officials about the role they played in awarding and monitoring competitive grants. In addition, we interviewed other officials at FWS and nongovernmental organizations involved in awarding or monitoring competitive grants. We also interviewed grant applicants, including state fish and wildlife agency officials and nongovernmental organizations, to learn about their experiences during the award and monitoring process for WSFR grants. We selected applicants that had various experiences with the grant programs in fiscal year 2016, including those that applied and did not receive funding and those that applied and received funding. The results of these interviews with grant applicants cannot be generalized to other applicants. Appendix I contains a more detailed description of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from March 2017 to February 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

FWS provides grants to a variety of recipients, including state agencies, tribal governments, and nongovernmental organizations. In fiscal year 2016, FWS awarded \$1.5 billion in grants, which was about 50 percent of the agency's total \$2.9 billion budget authority. Within FWS, WSFR is

responsible for awarding most of the grant funding available from FWS, and in fiscal year 2016, WSFR awarded \$1.2 billion in grants.<sup>7</sup>

As we have previously reported, most federal grant-making agencies generally follow a grants management process that includes awarding grant funds and monitoring grant projects.<sup>8</sup> The award process generally involves announcing the grant opportunities, reviewing applications, and making award decisions. During the monitoring process, the agency oversees the implementation of the grant project and periodically reviews financial and performance reports from grant recipients. In our past reports, we have found that it is important for federal agencies to employ a fair and transparent process to make award selections for competitive grant programs and to monitor federal grant funds to ensure that they are used properly and effectively to achieve program goals.<sup>9</sup>

In general, WSFR awards two types of grants: formula and competitive grants.

- **Formula grants:** WSFR awards these grants to recipients in amounts based on required formulas. The two largest formula grant programs WSFR manages are the Wildlife Restoration Program and Sport Fish Restoration Program, which provided \$699 million and \$356 million, respectively, in grants to states in fiscal year 2016.<sup>10</sup> According to WSFR documents and officials, these grants are often used by states to help their fish and wildlife agencies restore, enhance, and manage wildlife and sport fish resources and provide public access to those resources. Each state's use of certain funds and each state's wildlife and sport fish activities are to be audited every 5 years, and these audits have generally been conducted by Interior's Office of Inspector

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<sup>7</sup>WSFR staff are located in both FWS headquarters and regional offices. Program leaders for the grant programs are located in headquarters, and WSFR staff in each of the eight FWS regional offices assist in managing these grant programs. According to WSFR staff, program leaders provide guidance and oversight for grant programs, and WSFR regional staff serve as the grant recipients' primary points of contact for issues related to their grant-funded projects.

<sup>8</sup>[GAO-16-530](#) and [GAO-17-113](#).

<sup>9</sup>[GAO-16-530](#), [GAO-17-113](#), and GAO, *Grants Management: EPA Has Taken Steps to Improve Competition for Discretionary Grants but Could Make Information More Readily Available*, [GAO-17-161](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 23, 2017).

<sup>10</sup>See 16 U.S.C. §§ 669c(b) (Wildlife Restoration), 777c(c)(Sport Fish Restoration).

General (OIG).<sup>11</sup> According to Interior OIG officials, these audits have been conducted since 2002, and each state has been audited three times over the past 15 years.

- **Competitive grants:** WSFR awards these grants to eligible applicants for specific projects based on a competitive process in which grant applications are scored against certain criteria.<sup>12</sup> Competitive grants comprise a much smaller portion of the grant funding that WSFR awards; in fiscal year 2016, WSFR awarded about \$54 million in competitive grants. Competitive grants, unlike the formula grants, are not required under their program-specific statutes to be regularly audited. According to the Interior OIG and WSFR officials, the OIG has conducted few audits of these programs.<sup>13</sup>

Funding for most of WSFR's grant programs comes from two sources: the Wildlife Restoration Account and the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.<sup>14</sup> These accounts are generally funded by industries paying excise taxes and import duties on certain equipment and gear manufactured for purchase by hunters, anglers, boaters, archers, and recreational shooters, including pistols, bows and arrows, and fishing rods and reels, among other items.<sup>15</sup> Federal taxes on fuel for motorboats and small engines are also a source of funding.

In administering grant programs, WSFR adheres to federal laws and regulations, as well as agency policies and guidance.

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<sup>11</sup>See 16 U.S.C. §§ 669h(a)(6), 777h(a)(6).

<sup>12</sup>Depending on the grant program, eligible applicants can include state governments or nongovernmental organizations.

<sup>13</sup>See Department of the Interior OIG, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Clean Vessel Act Grants to the California Department of Boating and Waterways, Grant Nos. F10AP00748 and F10AP00749*, WR-GR-FWS-0007-2014 (September 2015) and *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grant Awarded to the California State Coastal Conservancy, Grant No. F11AP00966 For the Lower Redwood Creek Wetland Restoration*, WR-GR-FWS-0008-2014 (April 2015).

<sup>14</sup>The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund was created in 2005 by merging and transferring several accounts, including what was originally called the Sport Fish Restoration Account. See Pub. L. No. 109-59, §§ 10112(b), 11115, 119 Stat. 1144, 1927, 1949 (2005).

<sup>15</sup>An excise tax is placed on the producer or seller of a good or item, who then may raise the cost of the item to the purchaser to recover the cost of the tax. Import duties, also called customs duties, are tariffs imposed on imported goods.

- **Federal laws:** The 1937 Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the 1950 Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act established the Wildlife Restoration Program and the Sport Fish Restoration Program, respectively.<sup>16</sup> The Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts have been amended to, among other things, establish additional grant programs, many of which are competitive programs. For example, the Clean Vessel Act of 1992 amended the Dingell-Johnson Act and created the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program.<sup>17</sup> In addition, in 1998, the Sportfishing and Boating Safety Act amended the Dingell-Johnson Act and established the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program.<sup>18</sup>
- **Federal government-wide grant regulations:** The Uniform Guidance, issued by OMB and adopted by federal grant-making agencies, includes requirements for several aspects of the federal grants management process, including the award and monitoring processes. For example, sections 327 and 328 lay out general requirements for financial and performance reporting by grant recipients.<sup>19</sup>
- **Agency regulations:** Some of the WSFR grant programs have specific regulations that, among other things, define eligible activities, application procedures, and the conditions for using grant funding. For example, the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program, the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program, and the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program have program-specific regulations that govern aspects of the grant process, such as the eligible uses of grant funding.<sup>20</sup>
- **Agency policies and guidance:** WSFR also has agency guidance found in the FWS Service Manual, along with other guidance on

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<sup>16</sup>Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act, Pub. L. No. 75-415, 50 Stat. 917 (1937) (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. §§ 669-669k; Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act, Pub. L. No. 81-681, 64 Stat. 430 (1950) (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. §§ 777-777m).

<sup>17</sup>Pub. L. No. 102-587, tit. V, subtit. F, 106 Stat. 5039, 5086 (1992) (codified as amended at 33 U.S.C. § 1322 note).

<sup>18</sup>Pub. L. No. 106-178, § 7404, 112 Stat. 107, 486 (1998) (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 777g-1).

<sup>19</sup>2 C.F.R. § 200.327 governs financial reporting, and 2 C.F.R. § 200.328 governs monitoring and performance reporting.

<sup>20</sup>See 50 C.F.R. pt. 86 (Boating Infrastructure Grant Program); 50 C.F.R. pt. 85 (Clean Vessel Act Grant Program); 50 C.F.R. pt. 84 (National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program).

grants.<sup>21</sup> The manual describes the structure and functions of FWS's organization and contains policies and procedures that govern administrative activities and program operations. For example, the FWS Service Manual contains a chapter focused on the Multistate Conservation Grant Program that reiterates or clarifies requirements, including program-specific statutory requirements as well as those found in the Uniform Guidance. In addition to the FWS Service Manual, the FWS, and WSFR within it, is subject to grant management guidance issued by the Department of the Interior. For example, in December 2014, Interior's Office of Acquisition and Property Management issued a memorandum that required (1) maximum competition in grant awards through a fair and impartial competitive process, and (2) a comprehensive, impartial, and objective grant application review process based on criteria contained in the grant award announcement.<sup>22</sup>

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## WSFR Program Awards and Monitors Five Competitive Grant Programs

WSFR awards and monitors five competitive grant programs, according to agency documents and officials we interviewed. These five grant programs are (1) the Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program, (2) the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program, (3) the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program, (4) the Multistate Conservation Grant Program, and (5) the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program. While these grant programs support different types of projects, they generally are funded from the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund, and most require non-federal matching funds from the grant recipient based on statute. The exceptions to this are the Multistate Conservation Grant Program, which also receives funds from the Wildlife Restoration Account and does not require matching funds, and the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program, which receives funding from annual appropriations. Table 1 provides summary information on these five competitive grant programs.

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<sup>21</sup>FWS, *Service Manual*. For an example of other guidance, see FWS, *Issuing a New Financial Assistance Award Guidance*, January 6, 2017.

<sup>22</sup>Department of the Interior, *Financial Assistance Application and Merit Review Process*, (Dec. 22, 2014).

**Table 1: Information on Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) Competitive Grant Programs**

<b>Grant program</b>	<b>Boating Infrastructure Tier 2</b>	<b>Clean Vessel Act</b>	<b>Competitive State Wildlife</b>	<b>Multistate Conservation</b>	<b>National Coastal Wetlands Conservation</b>
<b>Types of projects</b>	Construction, renovation, and maintenance of dock facilities for recreational transient boats 26 feet or more in length. <sup>a</sup> Also for certain education materials on boating.	Construction, renovation, operation, or maintenance of pumpout and dump stations for sewage from boats. Also, for educating boaters about pollution from sewage discharge.	Projects that help state-identified species of greatest conservation need, which may include endangered or threatened species. Projects include conducting research, surveys, and species monitoring.	Certain projects that address national level priorities. Projects need to benefit 26 states or majority of states in a Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) region or a regional association of fish and wildlife agencies.	Acquisition or restoration of coastal wetlands.
<b>Source of funding</b>	Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.	Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.	Annual appropriations.	Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund and Wildlife Restoration Account.	Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.
<b>Required matching funds</b>	Minimum of 25 percent of total project cost. <sup>b</sup>	Minimum of 25 percent of total project cost. <sup>b</sup>	Minimum of 25 percent of total project cost. <sup>b</sup>	None.	Generally a minimum of 50 percent of total project cost. <sup>c, d</sup>

Source: GAO summary of WSFR documents. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>Transient means travel to a single facility for day use or staying at a single facility for up to 15 days.  
<sup>b</sup>American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are exempt from the matching requirement up to \$200,000 per application.  
<sup>c</sup>There is no match requirement for grant projects in American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, or the U.S. Virgin Islands.  
<sup>d</sup>The minimum required matching portion of funds decreases to 25 percent if a coastal state has established and is using a state fund that is used for the purpose of acquiring coastal wetlands or other natural areas or open spaces.

Across the five competitive grant programs, the number of grants and the funding awarded varied by program. In fiscal years 2012 through 2016, the largest amount of federal grant funding was awarded through the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program—about \$94 million total—while the least amount of grant funding was awarded through the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program—about \$24 million total, as shown in table 2.

**Table 2: Number of Grants and Federal Funding Awarded for Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Competitive Grant Programs, Fiscal Years 2012-2016<sup>a</sup>**

Dollars in thousands

	Boating Infrastructure Tier 2		Clean Vessel Act		Competitive State Wildlife		Multistate Conservation		National Coastal Wetlands Conservation	
	Number of grants awarded	Grant funding awarded	Number of grants awarded	Grant funding awarded	Number of grants awarded	Grant funding awarded	Number of grants awarded	Grant funding awarded	Number of grants awarded	Grant funding awarded
FY 12	7	\$5,572	25	\$8,815	12	\$5,903	13	\$2,789	21	\$16,297
FY 13	18	14,186	31	13,446	5	977	17	5,668	29	24,193
FY 14	12	9,029	31	16,259	39	7,144	13	3,441	18	12,213
FY 15	19	12,611	31	17,731	39	4,974	17	10,201	23	18,188
FY 16	13	10,062	31	11,395	27	5,236	18	4,277	29	23,478
<b>Total<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>69</b>	<b>\$51,459</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>\$67,646</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>\$24,235</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>\$26,375</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>\$94,369</b>

Legend: FY = fiscal year.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of the Interior's Financial and Business Management System data. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>These data, which are maintained in Interior's Financial and Business Management System, show grant awards in the fiscal year in which the funds were initially obligated to grant recipients and not necessarily the fiscal year in which the funds were received by the recipients. For grant recipients that receive funding over several years, the total amount of the grant appears in the fiscal year in which the grant was initially obligated. The funding amounts in this table show the federal funding for the grant and do not reflect any matching funds that were required by the terms of the grant.

<sup>b</sup>Because of rounding, some numbers may not total.

Based on our review of competitive grant award documentation for fiscal years 2012 through 2016, the percentage of projects selected from the applications received ranged from 63 percent for the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program to 100 percent for the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program. While all Clean Vessel Act grant applicants received funding, they did not all receive the total amount of funding requested; rather, the amount of funding was based on the total amount of funding available and the score the application received.<sup>23</sup> The same applies for other grant programs, as the agency sometimes provides less funding to a recipient than was requested depending on various factors, such as the total amount of funding available. For more information on the number of applications received and awards for each grant program, see appendixes II through VI.

<sup>23</sup>The fiscal year 2016 NOFO for the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program also states that each application requesting \$50,000 or less will be fully funded and that no application will receive more than 10 percent of the total available funds unless funds allow for all applications to be awarded.

In fiscal year 2016, the five WSFR competitive grant programs funded a variety of projects according to our review of the list of awarded projects.

- **Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program.** Grants were awarded to states for projects focused on improving facilities for recreational boaters. These projects included installing docks, installing boat slips, and constructing restroom and shower facilities for boaters. For more information on this grant program, see appendix II.
- **Clean Vessel Act Grant Program.** Grants were awarded to states for projects focused on constructing and maintaining facilities to accept sewage from recreational boats, including sewage pumpout stations and floating restrooms. In addition, some of the grants were to be used for public education materials on the importance of properly disposing sewage from boats. For more information on this grant program, see appendix III.
- **Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program.** Grants were awarded to states and a nongovernmental organization for projects focused on state-identified species of greatest conservation need, which may include endangered or threatened species. These projects included conducting research on these species along with creating and enhancing habitat for these species. For more information on this grant program, see appendix IV.
- **Multistate Conservation Grant Program.** Grants were awarded to nongovernmental organizations and federal agencies for a variety of projects that were national or regional in scope, such as providing training to state fish and wildlife officials. Over half of the grants awarded (11 of 18) were awarded to the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA),<sup>24</sup> but most of the funding went towards the administration of the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (\$6.4 million of the \$7.7 million).<sup>25</sup> According to AFWA and WSFR officials, the reason many grants are awarded to AFWA is because this organization is in a unique position to carry out

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<sup>24</sup>AFWA is a nongovernmental organization whose members include representatives from state fish and wildlife agencies from all 50 states. AFWA works on conservation and land management issues.

<sup>25</sup>FWS coordinates the survey, which has been conducted every 5 years since 1955, and the results are based on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. Under the statute governing the Multistate Conservation Grant Program, grants are permitted to be awarded to FWS to carry out this survey. See 16 U.S.C. §§ 669h-2(c)(1)(B), 777m(c)(1)(B).

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projects that benefit multiple states as required by law.<sup>26</sup> For more information on this grant program, see appendix V.

- **National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program.** Grants were awarded to states for projects focused on acquiring and restoring wetlands. Many of these projects focused on acquiring wetlands that benefit wildlife. For more information on this grant program, see appendix VI.

Under these five grant programs, state agencies often partner with subgrantees to carry out grant projects. According to WSFR officials, subgrants are common in the Boating Infrastructure Tier 2, Clean Vessel Act, and Competitive State Wildlife grant programs. For example, states are the recipients of Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 grants, but they can subgrant the money to marina operators to oversee the construction of dock facilities.

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## Grant Award Process Involves Announcing Grant Opportunity, Reviewing Applications, and Making Award Decisions and Is Generally Consistent with Regulations

The award process WSFR uses for the five competitive grant programs generally involves announcing the grant opportunity and reviewing applications to make award decisions, and in some cases federal agencies or third parties are involved in these activities. The award process used for the five competitive WSFR grant programs is generally consistent with federal grant regulations in the Uniform Guidance.

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<sup>26</sup>Specifically, a project shall not be eligible for a grant under the Multistate Conservation Grant Program unless the project will benefit at least 26 states, a majority of the states in a FWS region, or a regional association of state fish and game departments. 16 U.S.C. §§ 669h-2(b)(1), 777m(b)(1).

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## Award Process Involves Announcing Opportunities, Reviewing Applications, and Making Award Decisions, and Third Parties Play a Role in this Process for Some Grant Programs

The award process WSFR uses for the five competitive grant programs we reviewed involves announcing the grant opportunity and reviewing applications to make award decisions, and third parties are involved in these activities for some grant programs. Based on our review of agency guidance and interviews with WSFR officials, announcing a grant opportunity begins with developing a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). The NOFO contains information for applicants to consider when deciding whether to apply, including the amount of funding available, the types of applicants that are eligible, the process to apply, and the criteria that will be used to score applications. NOFOs are available publicly at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). Interested parties then submit grant applications, which WSFR reviews for eligibility by examining the project's goals, budget, and environmental impact, among other things. A review panel comprised of WSFR staff, and in some cases other FWS staff or a third party organization, reviews and scores the applications based on criteria in the NOFO and develops a list of recommended projects and funding amounts for these projects. This list is forwarded to the Director of FWS for review and approval and if approved, FWS then awards the grant.<sup>27</sup>

For all of the grant programs except for the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program, other federal agencies or third party organizations are involved in some aspects of the award process (as shown in table 3). In general, these entities are more involved in reviewing grant applications than in developing the NOFOs for the grant programs.

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<sup>27</sup>Starting in 2017, FWS forwards this list of recommended projects to the Office of the Secretary of the Interior for approval, prior to FWS awarding the grants.

**Table 3: Summary of Roles and Responsibilities During Award Process for Competitive Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) Grant Programs**

Grant program	Boating Infrastructure Tier 2	Clean Vessel Act	Multistate Conservation	National Coastal Wetlands Conservation	Competitive State Wildlife
<b>Who develops the Notice of Funding Opportunity?</b>	WSFR.	WSFR.	WSFR and Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). <sup>b</sup>	WSFR along with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Coastal Program. <sup>c</sup>	WSFR.
<b>Who reviews and scores the applications?</b>	WSFR and the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. <sup>a</sup>	WSFR scores the applications. The Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Coast Guard, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration are invited to review and score applications.	WSFR conducts administrative review of applications, and AFWA scores the applications. <sup>b</sup>	WSFR along with FWS Coastal Program.	WSFR.

Source: GAO summary of WSFR information and interviews with officials from WSFR and other parties involved in the award process. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council was established in 1993 to advise FWS on aquatic conservation and recreational boating issues.

<sup>b</sup>The statute governing the Multistate Conservation Grant Program provides that FWS may only make grants for projects identified on a priority list established by AFWA.

<sup>c</sup>The FWS Coastal Program focuses on conserving habitat in coastal areas of the United States.

AFWA, a third party, has the largest involvement in the award process for the Multistate Conservation Grant Program, and implements most aspects of the award process. Specifically, the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Improvement Act of 2000, which established this grant program, requires that FWS only fund grant projects that are on a priority list established by AFWA.<sup>28</sup> To develop this list, AFWA has developed a process to review and score applications,<sup>29</sup> and the highest-scoring applications are put on a priority list. This list is presented to all AFWA members at their annual meeting and if approved by the

<sup>28</sup>Pub. L. No. 106-408, §§ 113, 122(a), 114 Stat. 1762, 1767, 1772 (2000) (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. §§ 669h-2, 777m).

<sup>29</sup>The application process for the Multistate Conservation Grant Program consists of two steps. First, interested parties submit a letter of intent to AFWA, which provides a summary of the proposed project. Second, AFWA’s national grants committee, which is comprised of state fish and wildlife directors, scores these letters of intent based on criteria in the NOFO and invites the highest scoring applicants to submit a full application to be scored by the national grants committee.

membership, AFWA forwards the priority project list to the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for review and approval. The Multistate Conservation program leader at WSFR said he also reviews grant applications to determine whether the project's budget is reasonable and whether the project is eligible for funding.

Other federal agencies and third party organizations are also involved in the award process for other WSFR competitive grants programs as follows:

- **Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program:** The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council reviews and scores each grant application and provides these scores to WSFR.<sup>30</sup> The scores from the Council are averaged with WSFR's scores to develop a final ranked list of grant projects. Officials from the Council said that they provide expertise to the review process since Council members are often engineers or members of boating organizations.
- **Clean Vessel Act Grant Program:** Program regulations state that WSFR will convene a review panel to include representatives from WSFR, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. Coast Guard, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).<sup>31</sup> WSFR provides the grant applications and WSFR's proposed list of recommended projects to these agencies for review. According to WSFR officials, they have received limited input from these agencies, due in part to staff turnover at these agencies in recent years. For example, in fiscal year 2016, EPA indicated in an email to WSFR that it agreed with the proposed funding decisions for the program, and NOAA sent a letter to WSFR indicating that it had not reviewed all of the applications but it supported the program and did not object to the agency's scoring of the applications.
- **National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program:** Staff from FWS' Coastal Program partner with WSFR in developing the NOFO, reviewing applications, and scoring applications.<sup>32</sup> For example, the review panel for fiscal year 2016 included seven staff from the Coastal Program and four staff from WSFR.

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<sup>30</sup>Members of the Council's Boating Issues Subcommittee score the grant applications.

<sup>31</sup>50 C.F.R. § 85.31.

<sup>32</sup>The FWS Coastal Program focuses on conserving habitat in coastal areas of the United States.

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## Award Process Is Generally Consistent with Federal Grant Regulations

The five competitive WSFR grant programs we reviewed follow an award process that is generally consistent with federal grant regulations found in the Uniform Guidance. Specifically, the Uniform Guidance requires that grant funding opportunities be publicly announced and that the NOFO contains certain information, including the criteria and process used to evaluate applications.<sup>33</sup> In reviewing the five NOFOs used for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle for the five competitive grant programs, we found that all five NOFOs were made publicly available on the website [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), and the NOFOs contained the information required by the Uniform Guidance. These NOFOs contained criteria for scoring applications that matched the criteria in program-specific regulations for the grant programs that have them.<sup>34</sup> For example, the regulations for the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program contain 13 different scoring criteria, which were listed in the NOFO for that program.

The Uniform Guidance also contains provisions regarding a review process for grant applications. Specifically, the Uniform Guidance requires that, unless prohibited by federal statute, the agencies must design and execute a merit review process for competitive grant applications, and that this process must be described in the NOFO.<sup>35</sup> In accordance with the Uniform Guidance, Interior issued guidance on implementing a merit review process in December 2014.<sup>36</sup> This guidance requires that the “competitive process be fair and impartial” and that all applicants be evaluated based on the criteria in the funding announcement. In reviewing the five competitive grant programs, we found that there was a merit review process and that this process was described in the five NOFOs for fiscal year 2016 that we reviewed. As part of the merit review process, four of the competitive grant programs

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<sup>33</sup>2 C.F.R. §§ 200.202, 200.203. See also 2 C.F.R. pt. 2, appx. I, for the required format and contents of a NOFO.

<sup>34</sup>See, e.g., 50 C.F.R. §§ 86.51 (criteria used to evaluate Boating Infrastructure Grant Program Tier 2 applications), 85.30 (criteria for the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program), and 84.32 (criteria for the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program).

<sup>35</sup>2 C.F.R. § 200.204.

<sup>36</sup>Department of the Interior, *Financial Assistance Application and Merit Review Process*, (Dec. 22, 2014).

convened review panels attended by those that scored applications for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle, and these panels developed a recommended list of projects, according to our review of award documents. The exception was the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program, where an in-person review panel meeting was not held but rather projects were scored separately within each region, and regional officials submitted their scores to WSFR headquarters. These two sets of scores were combined and the WSFR program leader developed a recommended list of projects, according to WSFR officials.

The Uniform Guidance also requires that federal agencies must establish conflict of interest policies for federal awards.<sup>37</sup> As a result, in December 2014, Interior established a policy requiring agency officials who evaluate grant applications as part of a review panel to sign a conflict of interest certificate. In our review of the award documents for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle, we generally found signed copies of these certificates for members of the review panels, except for the Multistate Conservation Grant Program. This program did not have certificates for the fiscal year 2016 grant cycle because AFWA, which oversees the scoring of applications, did not require these forms until the fiscal year 2017 grant cycle. We reviewed these forms for the fiscal year 2017 grant cycle and found that each member of the AFWA review panel had submitted a form. AFWA officials said that the organization had previously required a general conflict of interest form to be signed by its members, and they started requiring a specific form for review panel members in fiscal year 2017 to align with Interior's policy.

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<sup>37</sup>2 C.F.R. § 200.112. The Uniform Guidance provides that the non-federal entity must disclose in writing any potential conflict of interest to the federal awarding agency or pass-through entity in accordance with the applicable federal awarding agency policy.

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## WSFR Monitors Grants in a Manner Consistent with Federal Grant Regulations, but Performance Reports Were Sometimes Missing Required Information

WSFR monitors its competitive grants primarily by reviewing annual financial and performance reports submitted by grant recipients, which is consistent with federal regulations. We found in our review of these reports for a sample of grant projects awarded funds in fiscal year 2015 that grant recipients generally submitted them on time, but that some performance reports were missing required information.

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### WSFR Monitors Grants through Review of Financial and Performance Reports

According to WSFR officials, their primary method for monitoring projects funded by competitive grants is to review financial and performance reports submitted by grant recipients. Grant recipients submit these reports to WSFR staff in FWS regional offices. According to regional WSFR officials, regional staff who specialize in financial matters review the financial reports to ensure they are filled out correctly. Staff do this by comparing financial information on the amount of federal funding reported by recipients with amounts found in Interior's Financial and Business Management System, which is used to track grants. In addition, WSFR grant specialists review the performance reports to ensure they contain required information, such as an update on the progress of meeting the specified goals of a grant project. If WSFR staff identify discrepancies in the financial reports or deficiencies in the performance reports, WSFR regional staff work with the grant recipients to resolve them. WSFR regional staff occasionally perform site visits to grant projects to verify grant activities described in the performance reports. WSFR regional staff said they perform site visits as funding and time allow and that recently they have had to limit site visits due to budget and staffing constraints.

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## Actions to Monitor Grants Are Consistent with Federal Grant Regulations, but Some Performance Reports Were Missing Required Information

The Uniform Guidance contains requirements for financial and performance reports for monitoring federal grants. Specifically, the Uniform Guidance requires federal agencies to collect financial information from grant recipients at least annually.<sup>38</sup> The Uniform Guidance also requires grant recipients to submit performance reports at least annually, and these reports are to include certain information, such as a comparison of the actual accomplishments of a grant with its goals and the reasons why goals were not met, if appropriate.<sup>39</sup> To further guide FWS staff in implementing these requirements, the FWS Service Manual provides additional information on the agency's expectations for these reports, including the required content. For example, the Service Manual states that recipients should submit financial information, including the amount of federal and matching funds spent and remaining on a grant. The Service Manual also identifies the standard federal form that should be used for this report.<sup>40</sup> For performance reports, the FWS Service Manual states that FWS must require certain information from grant recipients, including a comparison of actual accomplishments to the goals of the grant projects, and if the goals were not met, the reasons why.

In our review of the agency's monitoring process for selected grants awarded in fiscal year 2015,<sup>41</sup> we found that WSFR required both financial and performance reports at least annually, as required by the Uniform Guidance. In addition, the number and due dates of these reports

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<sup>38</sup>Specifically, the Uniform Guidance provides that the financial information must be collected with the frequency required by the terms and conditions of the federal award, but no less frequently than annually nor more frequently than quarterly except in unusual circumstances, for example where more frequent reporting is necessary for the effective monitoring of the federal award or could significantly affect program outcomes, and preferably in coordination with performance reporting. 2 C.F.R. § 200.327.

<sup>39</sup>Specifically, performance reports are to include a comparison of actual accomplishments to the objectives of the federal award established for the period, the reasons why established goals were not met, if appropriate, and additional pertinent information. 2 C.F.R. § 200.328(b)(2).

<sup>40</sup>This form is known as the *Federal Financial Report*, Standard Form 425.

<sup>41</sup>We selected fiscal year 2015 to ensure that enough time had elapsed under these grants for financial and performance reports to have been required and submitted.

were specified in the letters provided to grant recipients when they were awarded the grant. These award letters also specified the amount of federal funding for the grant along with any required non-federal matching funds. We reviewed 53 financial reports and 51 performance reports for a sample of 32 grants awarded in fiscal year 2015 and found that most reports were submitted by their due date or within 2 weeks of this date, as table 4 shows.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 4: Summary of File Review of Financial and Performance Reports For a Sample of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Grants Awarded in Fiscal Year 2015<sup>a</sup>**

	Financial reports	Performance reports
Total reports reviewed	53	51
Total reports on time	39	34 <sup>b</sup>
Total late reports <sup>c</sup>	13	15
Reports more than 2 weeks late <sup>d</sup>	6	8

Source: GAO analysis of financial and performance reports for grants awarded in fiscal year 2015. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>We reviewed files from a non-probability sample of 32 grants awarded in 2015. We selected these grants in order to review at least one file from each type of competitive grant program and at least one file from each of the 8 Fish and Wildlife Service regions. Many of the grants have operated for more than one year and, therefore, the grant recipients submitted multiple interim annual financial and performance reports to WSFR for review.

<sup>b</sup>Two performance reports were not dated, so it was not possible to determine whether they were on time.

<sup>c</sup>Late reports refer to financial and performance reports delivered after their due date, which is generally 90 days after every 12-month period after the grant award.

<sup>d</sup>This row is a subset of the total late reports.

In addition, the majority of the reports we reviewed met the content requirements found in the Uniform Guidance and the FWS Service Manual. Specifically, all 53 financial reports were submitted on the standard form prescribed by the Service Manual. In addition, the financial information on the amount of the grant and non-federal matching funds aligned with the amounts specified in the award letter for nearly all the financial reports we reviewed.<sup>43</sup> In our review of performance reports, we found that most contained information required by the Uniform Guidance on the grant project’s goals, progress toward those goals, and an explanation for why the goals had not been met, if applicable. However, in

<sup>42</sup>Many of the grant projects were for more than one year, so the grant recipients submitted multiple interim annual financial and performance reports to WSFR for review.

<sup>43</sup>For example, one grant recipient submitted two financial reports that showed the incorrect amount of matching funds. According to WSFR officials, this was due to an error by the grant recipient who filled out the form.

our sample, nine performance reports submitted for six awarded grants were missing some of this information. For example, one performance report stated that “no activities had occurred” under the grant, but it did not specify what the goals of the grant were or why no progress had been made, as required by the Uniform Guidance. Additionally, two annual performance reports for another grant described the goals of the grant and said they had not been met, but did not provide information as to why. Officials from one state fish and wildlife agency said that there was not a template to follow when preparing performance reports. Officials from another state agency said that while the requirements for performance reporting were laid out clearly in most NOFOs, they could be interpreted differently by different state officials, and these officials needed to ask for clarification from WSFR officials.

The format and content of the performance reports is generally left for grant recipients to choose, according to WSFR officials, because neither the Uniform Guidance nor internal FWS guidance recommends a specific template for the performance reports. However, the program leader for the Multistate Conservation Grant Program provides grant recipients with a suggested template to follow when preparing performance reports. The template contains areas in which to describe the goals and objectives of the grant along with progress made towards these. The seven performance reports we reviewed for the Multistate Conservation Grant Program followed this template and, as a result, all contained the information required by the Uniform Guidance. We also found that Region 8 developed a suggested template for performance reports, but the template did not explicitly ask for grant recipients to explain why the goals of a grant had not been met. The lack of a clear performance report template may have contributed to 2 of the 10 performance reports from region 8 we reviewed not including clear explanations of why the goals of the grant had not been met, as required by the Uniform Guidance. According to WSFR officials, the agency is planning to develop a more standardized reporting process for performance reports but the timeline for completion of this has not been formally established and remains uncertain.

According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, management should design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks. This includes designing mechanisms to help monitor performance to ensure the objectives of the program are being

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achieved.<sup>44</sup> As noted previously, the Uniform Guidance specifies that grant performance reports contain a comparison of actual accomplishments to the goals of the project, and the reasons why the goals were not met, as appropriate. The absence of a clear format for these reports may have contributed to some reports not containing all the information needed to comply with federal grant requirements. Without a template or some other standardized method for performance reporting across competitive grant programs, WSFR grant recipients may continue to submit performance reports to WSFR that do not meet all of the content requirements of the Uniform Guidance and do not convey all the information needed for FWS to oversee its competitive grant programs.

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## Conclusions

WSFR awards and monitors five competitive grant programs and, in general, WSFR's process for awarding and monitoring these grants is consistent with regulations for federal grants established in OMB's Uniform Guidance. However, there were instances in which the performance reports submitted by grant recipients did not include a comparison of actual accomplishments to the goals of the project, as required by the Uniform Guidance. WSFR does not have a template for performance reporting for four of the five competitive grant programs we reviewed, and the template used by one region does not clearly ask for all required information. Without a template or standardized method that facilitates the collection of performance information, WSFR grant recipients may continue to submit performance reports to WSFR that do not contain the information required by the Uniform Guidance and do not convey all the needed information for FWS to oversee its competitive grant programs.

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## Recommendation for Executive Action

The Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should direct WSFR to develop a template or other standardized method to facilitate collection of all required information for grant performance reports. (Recommendation 1)

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<sup>44</sup>GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2014).

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## Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of the Interior for review and comment. In its written comments, reproduced in appendix VII, the Department of the Interior agreed with our recommendation and described actions it plans to take.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of the Interior, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-3841 or [fennella@gao.gov](mailto:fennella@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix VIII.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne-Marie Fennell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Anne-Marie Fennell  
Director, Natural Resources and Environment

## Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to (1) identify and describe the competitive grant programs that the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) program awards and monitors; (2) examine how WSFR awards grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant federal regulations; and (3) examine how WSFR monitors grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant federal regulations.

To identify the competitive grant programs that WSFR both awards and monitors, we reviewed federal laws and regulations related to WSFR grant programs. In particular, we reviewed the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act and the 1950 Dingell-Johnson Sportfish Restoration Act and amendments to these laws, along with associated regulations for these laws. We also reviewed OMB's *Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards* (Uniform Guidance) for federal grant awards.<sup>1</sup> In addition, we reviewed agency guidance and information on grant programs; agency budget documents; and grant program descriptions in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance, a compilation of federal assistance programs that includes grants. Based on our review of these materials, we developed an initial list of grant programs that WSFR had a role in managing, and we spoke with WSFR officials to gather information on which competitive grant programs met the criteria of WSFR being responsible for both awarding and monitoring grants. We corroborated this list of grant programs with WSFR officials. We analyzed data on the competitive grant programs we identified from Interior's Financial and Business Management System for fiscal years 2012 through 2016, the most recent five-year period for when the award process had been completed. To determine the reliability of these data, we interviewed agency officials and conducted electronic testing of the data, and we determined the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes.

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<sup>1</sup>79 Fed. Reg. 75,871 (Dec. 19, 2014) (joint interim final rule implementing OMB's final Uniform Guidance); 78 Fed. Reg. 78,590 (Dec. 26, 2013) (OMB's final Uniform Guidance) (codified as amended at 2 C.F.R. pt. 200).

To examine the process WSFR uses to award competitive grants and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant federal regulations, we reviewed relevant agency regulations and guidance along with relevant sections of the Uniform Guidance. To assess the extent to which the award process is consistent with relevant regulations, we compared the process WSFR uses to award grants with OMB's Uniform Guidance. In addition, we reviewed award documents for grants awarded in fiscal year 2016 for the competitive grant programs we identified. We selected fiscal year 2016 because it was the most recently completed award cycle. These documents included the Notice of Funding Opportunity, which described the funding opportunity to applicants; documentation of the scoring of applications; and memos that documented the results of the scoring process. We also reviewed the entire grant files for eight grants awarded in fiscal year 2016 to determine what documents were contained in these files. In selecting this non-probability sample of files, we selected at least one file for each of the grant programs we examined and at least one file from each of the FWS regional offices that had a grant awarded in fiscal year 2016.<sup>2</sup> However, one of these files was misclassified under an incorrect grant program, so we excluded it from our review. As a result, we did not examine an entire file from the FWS Region 8 office. We reviewed the award documents and files using a standard document review tool to examine specific parts of these documents, such as the descriptions of the process used to review and score applications. To ensure that this review tool was filled out correctly, two GAO staff members reviewed the documents: one filled out the data collection instrument and the other verified this work. In addition to looking at award documents for fiscal year 2016, we also examined memos that documented the results of the grant scoring process for fiscal years 2012 through 2015 for the grant programs we identified. We reviewed the grant scoring memos from fiscal years 2012 through 2016 grants cycles because they comprise the most recent five-year period for when the award process had been completed.

To examine the process WSFR uses to monitor competitive grants and the extent to which those processes are consistent with relevant federal regulations, we reviewed relevant agency regulations and guidance along with relevant sections of the Uniform Guidance. To assess the extent to which the monitoring process is consistent with relevant regulations, we

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<sup>2</sup>Seven FWS regional offices had grants awarded in fiscal year 2016 from one of the competitive grant programs we examined. The exception is region 7, which did not have a grant awarded from one of these programs.

compared the process WSFR uses to monitor grants with OMB's Uniform Guidance. We used a standard document review tool to review financial and performance reports for 32 of 129 grants that were awarded in fiscal year 2015 to determine the extent to which these reports contained information required by the Uniform Guidance. We selected fiscal year 2015 to ensure that enough time had elapsed under these grants for financial and performance reports to have been required and submitted. In selecting this non-probability sample of files, we ensured that we had at least one file for each of the grant programs and at least one file from each of the eight FWS regional offices. For financial reports, we determined whether reported financial information on the grant award and matching funds aligned with the dollar amounts in their award letters, whether the reports were submitted by their due dates, and whether they were submitted on the correct form. For performance reports, we determined whether they were submitted by their due dates and whether they contained information on the grant project's goals, progress toward those goals, and an explanation why the goals had not been met, if applicable. The Uniform Guidance requires this information to be in performance reports. The results from our analysis of these documents are not generalizable to all monitoring documents for grants awarded in fiscal year 2015, but allowed us to examine how WSFR monitored selected grants.

For all three objectives, we interviewed WSFR staff responsible for managing WSFR grant programs. These included WSFR program leaders at headquarters and WSFR staff in each of the eight FWS regional offices that are responsible for the five competitive grant programs we reviewed. We asked these officials about the role they played in awarding and monitoring competitive grants. In addition, we interviewed other FWS officials that were involved with managing grants and officials from select third party organizations that played a role in awarding grants, including the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. We also interviewed grant applicants, including state fish and wildlife agency officials and nongovernmental organizations to learn about their experiences during the award and monitoring process for WSFR grants. We selected applicants that had various experiences with the grant programs in fiscal year 2016, including those that applied and did not receive funding and those that applied and received funding. The results of the interviews with grant applicants cannot be generalized to other applicants, but were used to obtain perspectives on the grant award and monitoring processes.

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We conducted this performance audit from March 2017 to February 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

## Appendix II: Information on the Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program

Below is summary information on the Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program that we compiled from reviewing relevant laws and regulations, reviewing agency documents, and interviewing agency officials.

Establishment and goals of the program:

- The program was established by the Sportfishing and Boating Safety Act of 1998, which amended the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act.<sup>1</sup>
- The program provides grants to be used for constructing, renovating, or maintaining docking or mooring facilities for transient, nontrailerable recreational vessels that are 26 feet or greater in length.<sup>2</sup> These facilities generally must allow public access, and examples of facilities that can be built with these funds include boat slips, piers, buoys, fuel stations, restrooms, bulkheads, dredging, or laundry facilities. Grants can also be awarded to produce information and education materials specific to the program or projects funded by the program.

Eligible grant recipients:

- Governor-designated agencies in a state of the United States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana

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<sup>1</sup>Pub. L. No. 106-178, § 7404, 112 Stat. 107, 486 (1998) (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 777g-1). Regulations for the program are codified at 50 C.F.R. pt. 86. There are two tiers that are part of the Boating Infrastructure Grant Program. The Tier 1 Grant Program is a non-competitive grant program that provides up to \$200,000 to states for eligible projects. In this report, we focus on the Tier 2 Grant Program because it is a competitive program.

<sup>2</sup>A nontrailerable recreational vessel is defined by statute as a recreational vessel 26 feet in length or longer (A) operated primarily for pleasure, or (B) leased, rented, or chartered to another for the latter's pleasure. 16 U.S.C. § 777g-1(e)(1). By regulation, eligible vessels do not include commercial vessels, vessels that dock or operate permanently from the facility where another Boating Infrastructure Grant-funded project is located, or vessels that receive payment to routinely transport passengers on a prescribed route, such as cruise ships, dive boats, and ferries. Transient means travel to a single facility for day use or staying at a single facility for up to 15 days. 50 C.F.R. § 86.3.

Islands, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands are eligible for this grant program.<sup>3</sup> The designated agency is often a state natural resource or fish and wildlife agency.

- Subgrants to other entities are allowed. According to Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) officials, subgrants under this program are common.

Program funding information:

- About 2 percent of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund is devoted to the grant program.<sup>4</sup> In fiscal year 2016, there was \$8.6 million in federal funds available for the Tier 2 program.
- The maximum grant award is \$1.5 million per project, and recipients generally must provide matching funds worth at least 25 percent of the total cost of projects.<sup>5</sup>
- Funds not obligated within three fiscal years shall be transferred to the Coast Guard and expended for state recreational boating safety programs.<sup>6</sup>

Highlights from the award process used in fiscal year 2016:

- The Notice of Funding Opportunity for fiscal year 2016 was posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) on June 22, 2015, and applications were due by September 18, 2015.
- Thirteen states submitted a total of 22 applications for projects. Regional staff for the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program and members from the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council scored the applications and recommended that 10 projects be fully

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<sup>3</sup>Specifically, one agency in each eligible state may apply for a grant if authorized to do so by a statute or regulation of the eligible jurisdiction, the Governor of the state, commonwealth, or territory, or the Mayor of the District of Columbia. 50 C.F.R. § 86.10.

<sup>4</sup>Some of this funding goes to the Boating Infrastructure Tier 1 grant program, which is a non-competitive program that awards up to \$200,000 to states for eligible projects.

<sup>5</sup>16 U.S.C. § 777g-1(d)(1). The first \$200,000 of the required match for each grant must be waived for American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. See 48 U.S.C. § 1469a; 50 C.F.R. § 86.32(a).

<sup>6</sup>See 16 U.S.C. § 777c(f).

**Appendix II: Information on the Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program**

funded and one be partially funded.<sup>7</sup> The Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved the list of recommended projects on March 11, 2016.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the selected projects on March 17, 2016.

Information on past applications and selected projects:

Table 5 shows the number of applications received and selected projects under the Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

**Table 5: Number of Applications, Selected Projects, and Funding for the Boating Infrastructure Tier 2 Grant Program, Fiscal Years 2012-2016<sup>a</sup>**

Dollars in millions

	Number of applications received	Number of selected projects	Amount of federal funding for selected projects	Amount of non-federal matching funds for selected projects	Matching funds as percentage of total project funding	Notes on selected projects <sup>b</sup>
FY 12	13	12	\$8.1	\$5.6	41	All 12 received full funding.
FY 13	33	25	\$18.2	\$18.6	51	24 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
FY 14	24	16	\$14.3	\$11.3	44	All 16 received full funding.
FY 15	20	18	\$12.3	\$16.1	57	17 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
FY 16	22	11	\$8.6	\$9.1	51	10 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
<b>Total</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>\$61.5</b>	<b>\$60.7</b>		

Legend: FY = fiscal year.

Source: GAO analysis of award documents from FY12-FY16. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>These data summarize the outcomes of the ranking and selection process and do not reflect the number of projects that received actual funding. In some instances, a project can be selected for award but not funded because the project does not proceed for a variety of reasons, such as an applicant not having the required matching funds.

<sup>b</sup>Full funding means that the selected project receives the amount of funding requested. Partial funding means the selected project receives less than was requested.

<sup>7</sup>The Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council was established in 1993 to advise the Fish and Wildlife Service on aquatic conservation and recreational boating issues.

## Appendix III: Information on the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program

Below is summary information on the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program that we compiled from reviewing relevant laws and regulations, reviewing agency documents, and interviewing agency officials.

Establishment and goals of the program:

- The program was established by the Clean Vessel Act of 1992, which amended the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act.<sup>1</sup>
- This program funds grants to coastal states for certain activities, such as constructing and renovating pumpout stations and waste reception facilities and conducting a program to educate recreational boaters about the problem of human body waste discharges from vessels and inform them of the locations of pumpout stations and waste reception facilities. The program also funds grants to inland states meeting certain criteria.<sup>2</sup> Under program regulations, facilities need to be open to the public in order to be eligible for a grant.<sup>3</sup>
- Since the program was established, over 6,000 dump or pumpout facilities have been built and over 3,700 of these facilities have been operated or maintained using grant funds.

Eligible grant recipients:

- Governor-designated agencies in a state of the United States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands are eligible for this grant program. The designated agency is often a state natural resource or fish and wildlife agency.
- Subgrants to other entities are allowed. According to Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) officials, subgrants under this program are common.

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<sup>1</sup>Pub. L. No. 102-587, tit. V, subtit. F, 106 Stat. 5039, 5086 (1992) (codified as amended at 33 U.S.C. § 1322 note). Regulations for the program are codified at 50 C.F.R. pt. 85.

<sup>2</sup>See 33 U.S.C. § 1322 note; 50 C.F.R. § 85.20.

<sup>3</sup>50 C.F.R. § 85.11.

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**Appendix III: Information on the Clean Vessel  
Act Grant Program**

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Program funding information:

- About 2 percent of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund is devoted to the grant program. In fiscal year 2016, there was \$13.7 million in federal funds available for the program.
- The maximum award amount is generally \$1.5 million,<sup>4</sup> and recipients generally must provide matching funds worth at least 25 percent of the total cost of projects.<sup>5</sup>
- Funds not obligated within three fiscal years shall be transferred to the U.S. Coast Guard and expended for state recreational boating safety programs.<sup>6</sup>

Highlights from the award process used in fiscal year 2016:

- The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for fiscal year 2016 was posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) on August 12, 2015, and applications were due by December 2, 2015.
- A total of 21 states and the District of Columbia submitted 33 applications. WSFR staff from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regions scored applications in their regions; then, these scores were averaged with scores from the WSFR program leader for the Clean Vessel Act grant program, who scored all of the applications. WSFR provided copies of grant applications to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Coast Guard, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for them to review and score the applications. WSFR also provided its scores on the applications to these agencies. EPA informed WSFR in an email that it agreed with the proposed funding decisions for the program. According to WSFR, the Coast Guard did not provide comments on the proposed scores. NOAA sent a letter to WSFR indicating that it had not reviewed all of the applications but it supported the program and did not object to the agency's scoring of the applications. The Deputy Director of the U.S.

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<sup>4</sup>Coastal states can apply for up to \$3 million and can use \$1.5 million for coastal activities and \$1.5 million for inland activities. Inland states can apply for up to \$1.5 million.

<sup>5</sup>American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are exempt from the matching requirement up to \$200,000 per application. See 48 U.S.C. § 1469a.

<sup>6</sup>See 16 U.S.C. § 777c(f).

Fish and Wildlife Service approved the list of recommended projects on April 28, 2016.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the winning grant awards on May 11, 2016.
- According to the fiscal year 2016 NOFO, this program attempts to provide support to as many eligible projects as possible. In practice, all eligible applications have been awarded funds from fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2016. If funding requests exceed available funds, WSFR applies a formula to allocate funding based on the score the application receives.

Information on past applications and selected projects:

Table 6 shows the number of applications received and selected projects under the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

**Table 6: Number of Applications, Selected Projects, and Funding for the Clean Vessel Act Grant Program, Fiscal Years 2012-2016<sup>a</sup>**

Dollars in millions

	Number of applications received	Number of selected projects	Amount of federal funding for selected projects	Amount of non-federal matching funds for selected projects	Matching funds as percentage of total project funding	Notes on selected projects <sup>b</sup>
FY 12	34	34	\$11.4	\$3.8	25	All received full funding.
FY 13	32	32	\$15.1	\$5.1	25	All received full funding.
FY 14	31	31	\$16.6	\$5.5	25	All received full funding.
FY 15	38	38	\$16.2	\$5.4	25	11 received full funding; 27 partially funded.
FY 16	33	33	\$13.7	\$4.6	25	7 received full funding; 26 partially funded.
<b>Total</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>\$73</b>	<b>\$24.4</b>		

Legend: FY = fiscal year.

Source: GAO analysis of award documents from FY12-FY16. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>These data summarize the outcomes of the ranking and selection process and do not reflect the number of projects that received actual funding. In some instances, a project can be selected for award but not funded because the project does not proceed for a variety of reasons such as an applicant not having the required matching funds.

<sup>b</sup>Full funding means that the selected project receives the amount of funding requested. Partial funding means the selected project receives less than was requested.

## Appendix IV: Information on the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program

Below is summary information on the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program that we compiled from reviewing relevant laws and regulations, reviewing agency documents, and interviewing agency officials.

Establishment and goals of the program:

- The State Wildlife Grant Program provides grants for the development and implementation of programs for the benefit of wildlife and their habitats, including species that are not hunted or fished. Eligible activities include planning and conservation implementation.
- The competitive portion of the State Wildlife Grant Program was established by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008.<sup>1</sup>

Eligible grant recipients:

- Fish and wildlife agencies in a state of the United States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands and at the discretion of affected states, the regional Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies are eligible for this grant program.<sup>2</sup> According to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for this program, for each of the 48 contiguous United States and the District of Columbia, at least two states must be active participants in proposed conservation actions.
- Applicants are also encouraged to engage with other partners on projects. Potential partners include tribes, federal agencies, other state agencies, local governments, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, private landowners, industry groups, and international partners.

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<sup>1</sup>The State Wildlife Formula Grant Program was established in 2000 and the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program was established in fiscal year 2008 through Pub. L. No. 110-161, 121 Stat. 1844, 21043 (2007). About 10 percent of State Wildlife Grant Program grant funds are competitive and the rest is awarded based on a formula.

<sup>2</sup>The Regional Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies were included as eligible applicants beginning in fiscal year 2014. See Pub. L. No. 113-76, 128 Stat. 5, 293 (2014).

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**Appendix IV: Information on the Competitive  
State Wildlife Grant Program**

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Program funding information:

- The program is governed and funded through annual appropriations acts. In fiscal year 2016, there was about \$5.6 million available for the program.
- For most applicants proposing a multi-state project, the maximum award is \$500,000 and the minimum award is \$50,000.<sup>3</sup> Applicants must provide matching funds worth at least 25 percent of the total cost of projects.<sup>4</sup>
- Past appropriations for these grants have been appropriated to remain available until expended. The appropriations acts governing the program have generally provided that any amount apportioned in one fiscal year that remains unobligated by the end of the next fiscal year are to be reapportioned in the following fiscal year.

Highlights from the award process used in fiscal year 2016:

- The NOFO for fiscal year 2016 was posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) on November 20, 2015, and applications were due by February 19, 2016.
- The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) received 21 eligible applications. Applications were reviewed by a panel consisting of WSFR staff from each region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The panel recommended fully funding 14 projects and partially funding 1 project, for a total of \$5.6 million, with \$2.9 million in non-federal matching funds. The Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved the list of recommended projects on May 19, 2016.
- FWS announced the selected projects on May 20, 2016.

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<sup>3</sup>Only Alaska, Hawaii, and the other insular jurisdictions of the United States may propose projects benefiting a single state; the maximum award for these States is \$250,000 and the minimum award is \$25,000.

<sup>4</sup>American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are exempt from the matching requirement up to \$200,000 per application. See 48 U.S.C. § 1469a.

**Appendix IV: Information on the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program**

Information on past applications and selected projects:

Table 7 shows the number of applications received and selected projects under the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

**Table 7: Number of Applications, Selected Projects, and Funding for the Competitive State Wildlife Grant Program, Fiscal Years 2012-2016<sup>a</sup>**

Dollars in millions

	<b>Number of applications received</b>	<b>Number of selected projects</b>	<b>Amount of federal funding for selected projects</b>	<b>Amount of non-federal matching funds for selected projects</b>	<b>Matching funds as percentage of total project funding</b>	<b>Notes on selected projects<sup>b</sup></b>
FY 12	16	7	\$5.7	\$4.0	<b>41</b>	5 received full funding; 2 partially funded.
FY 13	21	16	\$5.1	\$3.2	<b>39</b>	15 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
FY 14	23	16	\$5.7	\$2.9	<b>34</b>	14 received full funding; 2 partially funded.
FY 15	32	17	\$5.8	\$2.9	<b>33</b>	15 received full funding; 2 partially funded.
FY 16	21	15	\$5.6	\$2.9	<b>34</b>	14 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>\$27.9</b>	<b>\$15.9</b>		

Legend: FY = fiscal year.

Source: GAO analysis of award documents from FY12-FY16. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>These data summarize the outcomes of the ranking and selection process and do not reflect the number of projects that received actual funding. In some instances, a project can be selected for award but not funded because the project does not proceed for a variety of reasons, such as an applicant not having the required matching funds.

<sup>b</sup>Full funding means that the selected project receives the amount of funding requested. Partial funding means the selected project receives less than was requested.

## Appendix V: Information on the Multistate Conservation Grant Program

Below is summary information on the Multistate Conservation Grant Program that we compiled from reviewing relevant laws and regulations, reviewing agency documents, and interviewing agency officials.

Establishment and goals of the program:

- The program was established by the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs Improvement Act of 2000, which amended the Pittman-Roberts Wildlife Restoration Act and the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Act.<sup>1</sup>
- The program focuses on funding multistate conservation projects that benefit a certain number of states or a regional association of state fish and game departments.

Eligible grant recipients:

- Fish and wildlife agencies in a state of the United States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands are eligible for this grant program. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is also an eligible applicant for the purpose of carrying out the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, which is conducted every five years.<sup>2</sup> Nongovernmental organizations are also eligible, provided that they submit a certification that they will not use the grant funds to fund, in whole or in part, any activity of the organization that promotes or encourages opposition to the regulated hunting or trapping of wildlife<sup>3</sup> or the regulated taking of fish.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Pub. L. No. 106-408, §§ 113, 122(a), 114 Stat. 1762, 1767, 1772 (2000) (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. §§ 669h-2, 777m).

<sup>2</sup>FWS coordinates the survey, which has been conducted every 5 years since 1955, and the results are based on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey collects information on participation in and expenditures for hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching activities such as observing, feeding, and photographing wildlife.

<sup>3</sup>16 U.S.C. § 669h-2(c)(2)(A).

- Grant projects shall not be eligible unless they will benefit at least 26 states, a majority of states in a FWS region, or a regional association of state fish and wildlife agencies.
- By statute,<sup>5</sup> FWS may only make grants for projects identified on a priority list prepared by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA), a nongovernmental organization that represents state fish and wildlife agencies on conservation and land management issues, after following certain procedures.<sup>6</sup>

Program funding information:

- Up to \$6 million annually is authorized to fund grants, with no more than \$3 million from the Wildlife Restoration Account and \$3 million from the Sport Fish Restoration Trust Fund. In practice, some of the grant funds are carried over to future years to fund certain multi-year projects, such as the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.
- This program does not have a matching funds requirement.
- Funds not obligated within two fiscal years revert back to the Wildlife Restoration and Sport Fish Restoration programs for apportionment to the states.

Highlights from the award process used in fiscal year 2016:

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<sup>4</sup>16 U.S.C. § 777m(c)(2)(A).

<sup>5</sup>16 U.S.C. §§ 669h-2(b)(3), 777m(b)(3). Specifically, the priority list is one that AFWA (A) prepares through a committee comprised of the heads of state fish and game departments (or their designees, in consultation with (i) nongovernmental organizations that represent conservation organizations, (ii) sportsmen organizations, and (iii) industries that fund the sport fish restoration programs under the Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson Acts; (B) approves by vote a majority of the heads of state fish and game departments (or their designees); and (C) not later than October 1 of each fiscal year, submits to the Assistant Director for Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Programs. The Assistant Director is also to publish in the Federal Register each priority list submitted. 16 U.S.C. §§ 669h-2(b), 777m(b). The statute states that the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies is tasked with these responsibilities. In 2006, the organization changed its name, by dropping “International” from its name.

<sup>6</sup>AFWA is a nongovernmental organization that represents North American fish and wildlife agencies. Its members include agencies from all 50 states in the United States and the Canadian provinces. Members also include federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations. In fiscal year 2016, AFWA’s members provided about \$1.27 million in dues to AFWA.

- The Notice of Funding Opportunity for fiscal year 2016 was posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) on April 13, 2015, and the deadline for submitting letters of intent to AFWA was May 11, 2015. These letters of intent provide a summary of the grant project, and they were scored by AFWA's national grants committee.<sup>7</sup> The highest-scoring applicants were invited to submit a full grant application to AFWA by August 14, 2015. The national grants committee scored these applications and presented these scores to AFWA members at its annual meeting in September 2015. Members voted to approve the priority list at this meeting.
- AFWA provided the priority list containing 18 projects to FWS. The Deputy Director of Program Management and Policy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved the list of recommended projects on December 7, 2015.
- During the award process, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration staff also reviewed the grant applications.
- FWS announced the selected projects on February 11, 2016.

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<sup>7</sup>AFWA's national grants committee has eight members, who are typically directors of state fish and wildlife agencies. The committee's primary responsibility is to oversee the Multistate Conservation Grant Program.

**Appendix V: Information on the Multistate Conservation Grant Program**

Information on past applications and selected projects:

Table 8 shows the number of applications received and selected projects under the Multistate Conservation Grant Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

**Table 8: Number of Applications, Selected Projects, and Funding for the Multistate Conservation Grants, Fiscal Years 2012-2016<sup>a</sup>**

Dollars in millions

	Number of letters of intent submitted <sup>b</sup>	Number of full applications received <sup>b</sup>	Number of selected projects	Amount of federal funding for selected projects	Amount of non-federal matching funds for selected projects <sup>d</sup>	Notes on selected projects <sup>d</sup>
FY 12	34	13	12	\$2.6	\$0	The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) received 5 grants totaling \$1.4 million. <sup>e</sup> There were no grants made for the National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. <sup>f</sup>
FY 13	69	22	17	\$5.8	\$0	AFWA received 8 grants totaling \$3.2 million. There was one grant for the survey for \$321,000.
FY 14	50	23	15	\$4.5	\$0	AFWA received 8 grants totaling \$1.9 million. There were 3 grants for the survey totaling \$1.0 million. <sup>g</sup>
FY 15	34	19	17	\$4.5	\$0	AFWA received 8 grants totaling \$1.4 million. There were 3 grants for the survey totaling \$1.6 million.
FY 16	30	16	18 <sup>c</sup>	\$7.7	\$0	AFWA received 11 grants totaling \$1.1 million. There were 4 grants for the survey totaling \$6.4 million. <sup>h</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>\$25.1</b>	<b>\$0</b>	

Legend: FY = fiscal year.

Source: GAO analysis of award documents from FY12-FY16. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>These data summarize the outcomes of the ranking and selection process and do not reflect the number of projects that received actual funding.

<sup>b</sup>Letters of intent provide a summary of the grant project, and the highest scoring letters of intent are invited to submit full grant applications.

<sup>c</sup>There were more selected projects than applications submitted in fiscal year 2016 because some of the projects were for multi-year grants selected in earlier years.

<sup>d</sup>This grant program does not have a matching funds requirement.

<sup>e</sup>AFWA is an organization that represents state fish and wildlife agencies on conservation and land management issues.

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**Appendix V: Information on the Multistate  
Conservation Grant Program**

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<sup>f</sup>This survey has been conducted every 5 years since 1955. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service coordinates the survey, which is based on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau.

<sup>g</sup>AFWA received one of the survey grants for \$91,200.

<sup>h</sup>AFWA received one of the survey grants for \$6,720.

## Appendix VI: Information on the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program

Below is summary information on the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program that we compiled from reviewing relevant laws and regulations, reviewing agency documents, and interviewing agency officials.

Establishment and goals of the program:

- The program was established by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act.<sup>1</sup>
- This program's primary goal is the long-term conservation of coastal wetlands' ecosystems. It accomplishes this by helping states protect, restore, and enhance their coastal habitats through a competitive grants program.
- Since 1992, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has awarded over \$377 million through these grants.

Eligible grant recipients:

- Governor-designated agencies of an eligible coastal state are eligible for this grant program.<sup>2</sup> The designated agency is often a state natural resource or fish and wildlife agency.
- Subgrants are allowed, are relatively common, and can be awarded to local governments and nonprofit organizations.

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<sup>1</sup>Pub. L. No. 101-646, tit. III, § 305, 104 Stat. 4761, 4785 (1990) (codified as amended at 16 U.S.C. § 3954). Regulations for the program are codified at 50 C.F.R. pt. 84.

<sup>2</sup>Eligible coastal states are states bordering the Great Lakes (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin); states bordering the Atlantic, Gulf (except Louisiana, which is excluded because it is eligible to receive separate priority consideration funding), and Pacific coasts (Alabama, Alaska, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, and Washington); and American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

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**Appendix VI: Information on the National  
Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program**

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Program funding information:

- About 3 percent of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund is devoted to the grant program. In fiscal year 2016, there was about \$20.3 million in federal funds available for the program.
- The maximum award amount is \$1 million, and states generally must provide 50 percent of the total cost of the project. However, states that have established and are using a state fund for the purpose of acquiring coastal wetlands must provide a minimum of 25 percent of the total cost of projects.<sup>3</sup>
- Projects are generally funded through annual proposals. Funds must be obligated by December 31st of the year after funds were allocated, meaning that, for example, fiscal year 2015 funds must be obligated by December 31, 2016. Funds not obligated during the specified time frame return to the FWS program account.

Highlights from the award process used in fiscal year 2016:

- The Notice of Funding Opportunity for fiscal year 2016 was posted on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) on February 5, 2015, and applications were due by June 24, 2015.
- The FWS Wildlife Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) received 32 applications. A panel of WSFR and FWS Coastal Program regional officials scored and ranked the applications, and recommended 28 projects for funding. The Deputy Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved the list of recommended projects on January 13, 2016.
- WSFR awarded \$20 million in grant funding, which was supplemented by \$20.5 million in non-federal matching funds.
- FWS announced the selected projects on February 2, 2016.

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<sup>3</sup>There is no match requirement for grant projects in American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, or the U.S. Virgin Islands. See 48 U.S.C. § 1469a; 50 C.F.R. § 84.46(b).

**Appendix VI: Information on the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program**

Information on past applications and selected projects:

Table 9 shows the number of applications received and selected projects under the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program in fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

**Table 9: Number of Applications, Selected Projects, and Funding for the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, Fiscal Years 2012-2016<sup>a</sup>**

Dollars in millions

	<b>Number of applications received</b>	<b>Number of selected projects</b>	<b>Amount of federal funding for selected projects</b>	<b>Amount of non-federal matching funds for selected projects</b>	<b>Matching funds as percentage of total project funding</b>	<b>Notes on selected projects<sup>b</sup></b>
FY 12	26	24	\$20.5	\$21.0	<b>51</b>	23 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
FY 13	32	24	\$20.0	\$21.2	<b>52</b>	23 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
FY14	22	21	\$16.5	\$18.5	<b>53</b>	All received full funding.
FY 15	36	18	\$21.0	\$31.4	<b>60</b>	All received full funding.
FY 16	32	28	\$20.3	\$20.5	<b>50</b>	27 received full funding; 1 partially funded.
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>\$98.3</b>	<b>\$112.6</b>		

Legend: FY = fiscal year.

Source: GAO analysis of award documents from FY12-FY16. | GAO-18-303

<sup>a</sup>These data summarize the outcomes of the ranking and selection process and do not reflect the number of projects that received actual funding. In some instances, a project can be selected for award but not funded because the project does not proceed for a variety of reasons, such as an applicant not having the required matching funds.

<sup>b</sup>Full funding means that the selected project receives the amount of funding requested. Partial funding means the selected project receives less than was requested.

## Appendix VII: Comments from the Department of the Interior



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

FEB - 8 2018

Ms. Anne-Marie Fennell  
Director, Natural Resources and Environment  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Fennell:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report entitled *Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration: Competitive Grant Programs Managed Consistently with Relevant Regulations, but Monitoring Could Be Improved* (GAO-18-303). We appreciate GAO's review of Wildlife and Sport Fish Recreation's (WSFR) management of its competitive grant programs.

The Department concurs with the recommendation issued to the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) that WSFR develop a template or other standardized method to facilitate collection of all required information for performance reports. The WSFR program is working cooperatively with its State fish and wildlife agency partners to identify the required standards and specific components of a standardized performance report which will also fully comply with the requirements of the Office of Management and Budget's Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, commonly called Uniform Guidance. The standardized format and collection of the required informational elements will be implemented through the modification of the WSFR program's grants performance reporting information technology system.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact Mr. Scott Knight, Chief of the Division of Financial Assistance Support and Oversight, at (703) 358- 2237 or Mr. Ord Bargerstock, Chief of the Branch of Compliance at (703) 358-1841.

Sincerely,

Jason Larrabee  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary  
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks  
Exercising the Authority of the Assistant Secretary  
for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

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## Appendix VIII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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### GAO Contact

Anne-Marie Fennell, (202) 512-3841 or [fennella@gao.gov](mailto:fennella@gao.gov)

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### Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the individual named above Elizabeth Erdmann (Assistant Director), Steven Bagley, and Scott Heacock made key contributions to this report. Additional contributions were made by Thomas M. James, Ying Long, Kim McGatlin, Patricia Moye, Anne Rhodes-Kline, and Sheryl Stein.

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## Appendix IX: Accessible Data

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### Agency Comment Letter

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#### Text of Appendix VII: Comments from the Department of the Interior

Ms. Anne-Marie Fennell

Director, Natural Resources and Environment

U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street NW

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Jason Labee

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Exercising the Authority of the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife  
and Parks

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