

Why GAO Did This Study

The Corps reports having a backlog of more than 1,000 authorized water resources construction projects in its Civil Works Program that it estimates to cost more than \$62 billion to complete, as of June 2014. Federal statute requires the Corps to identify for deauthorization projects that have had no obligations for 5 years and studies that have had no appropriations for 5 years. Once a project or study is deauthorized, it must be reauthorized to begin or resume construction or study.

GAO was asked to review the Corps' construction backlog and deauthorization processes. This report examines (1) the extent to which the Corps tracks its backlog of construction projects and studies, and (2) the extent to which the Corps identifies construction projects and studies eligible for deauthorization, and meets statutory deauthorization requirements. GAO reviewed legislation, Corps policy, guidance, and documentation of its backlog and deauthorization process. GAO interviewed Corps headquarters officials and officials from 16 of the Corps' 38 domestic civil works districts, selected based on geographical representation and number of projects.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that the Corps establish and implement policies to ensure projects and studies are tracked; establish a mechanism to track studies; and develop and implement policies to identify projects and studies that meet deauthorization criteria, and notify Congress. The Department of Defense concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-14-699](#). For more information, contact Anne-Marie Fennell at (202) 512-3841 or fennella@gao.gov.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

The Corps Needs to Take Steps to Identify All Projects and Studies Eligible for Deauthorization

What GAO Found

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) backlog list of authorized water resources construction projects is incomplete because the agency does not track all authorized projects and the list does not include studies. Specifically, GAO found that the backlog does not include some projects that were authorized but were not appropriated funds. Corps headquarters officials said that the agency does not have a policy instructing its district offices to enter into their databases projects that are authorized but have not been appropriated funds and that it is up to the discretion of the district offices to do so. Corps officials also stated that the agency does not include studies on its backlog, nor does it have a policy instructing district offices to track studies. Federal internal control standards state that agencies are to document internal controls in management directives, administrative policies, or operating manuals to help ensure consistent treatment. Officials at 15 of 16 district offices told GAO that they enter projects into the databases only after funds are appropriated. The Corps has begun to take steps to include all authorized projects in a new agency database; however, this database will not include studies. Federal internal control standards call for agencies to have mechanisms to appropriately document transactions and other significant events. Without written policies requiring districts to track all projects and studies and a mechanism to track studies, the Corps may continue to have an incomplete backlog list. The absence of a complete backlog list of projects and studies will likely make it difficult for the Corps to know the full universe of unmet water resource needs of the country, and Congress to make informed decisions when authorizing projects and studies, and appropriating funds.

The Corps has not identified all eligible construction projects and studies for deauthorization and has not complied with statutory requirements to notify Congress of all projects and studies eligible for deauthorization. The agency is unlikely to identify those projects that have been excluded from the databases and had no funds obligated for 5 fiscal years, because, as discussed above, the Corps does not require districts to enter all authorized projects into its databases. Officials GAO interviewed from 5 of 16 districts said they likely would not identify and add projects to the draft deauthorization eligible list because they were not required to do so. Moreover, the Corps has not complied with statutory requirements to notify Congress of all projects that have not had obligations in 5 fiscal years. Specifically, the Corps cannot demonstrate it transmitted a list of projects eligible for deauthorization 8 times in the 12 years it was required to do so since 1997. Corps headquarters officials said that the process and communication mechanisms for deauthorizing projects are not in Corps policies or procedures. Without documented policies and procedures consistent with federal standards for internal control, the Corps may continue its inconsistent publishing of deauthorization lists. In addition, the Corps has not complied with requirements to identify studies for deauthorization because officials have said the agency does not have the policies and procedures in place to do so. Without having the data, as discussed above, or policies and procedures in place to identify studies for deauthorization, the Corps and Congress will not have complete information to make decisions when prioritizing the water resources needs of the country.