

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-526](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The GLRI seeks to address issues such as water quality contamination and nonnative, or “invasive,” species that threaten the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem. A Task Force of 11 federal agencies, chaired by the EPA Administrator, oversees the GLRI. Task Force agencies conduct work themselves or through agreements with nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions, or other entities.

GAO was asked to review how GLRI funds have been used. This report examines the (1) amount of federal funds made available for the GLRI and expended for projects; (2) process the Task Force used to identify GLRI work and funding; and (3) information available about GLRI project activities and results. GAO analyzed funding data for the GLRI and five agencies that received the majority of GLRI funds; GLAS data; accomplishment reports; and 19 GLRI projects selected by funding amounts and agencies to illustrate projects with typical funding amounts. This sample is not generalizable to all projects.

What GAO Recommends

Among other things, GAO recommended in its draft report that EPA determine if it should continue using GLAS or acquire a different system and ensure that the agency develops guidance for entering data and establishes data quality control activities. EPA took action to address these recommendations as GAO completed its work. GAO reviewed the actions taken and determined that the recommendations had been addressed. As a result, GAO removed the recommendations.

View [GAO-15-526](#). For more information, contact J. Alfredo Gómez at (202) 512-3841 or gomezj@gao.gov.

July 2015

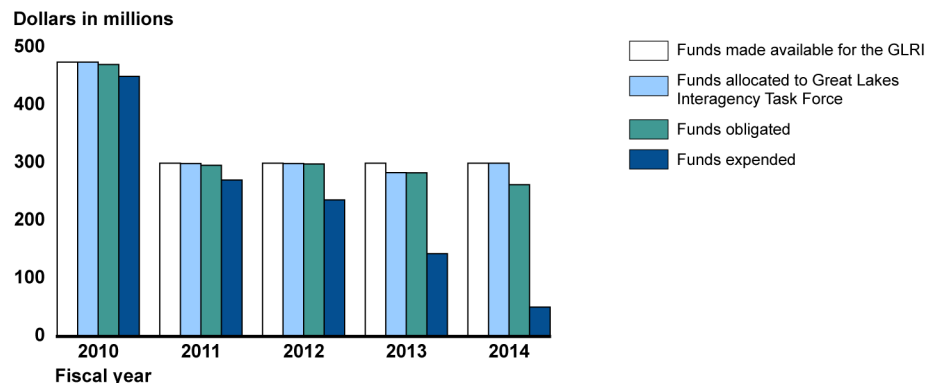
GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE

Improved Data Collection and Reporting Would Enhance Oversight

What GAO Found

Nearly all of the \$1.68 billion of federal funds made available for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) for fiscal years 2010 through 2014 had been allocated as of January 2015. Of the \$1.66 billion allocated, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the other Task Force agencies expended \$1.15 billion for 2,123 projects (see fig.). Agencies can liquidate and adjust obligations for 7 years after funds are no longer available for obligation.

Status of GLRI Funds, Fiscal Years 2010 through 2014



Source: GAO analysis of EPA's January 2015 GLRI financial management update reports. | GAO-15-526

The Task Force's process to identify each agency's GLRI work and funding has evolved to emphasize interagency discussion. In fiscal year 2012, the Task Force created subgroups to discuss and identify work on three issues, setting aside about \$180 million for these issues over 3 years. This included cleaning up severely degraded locations called Areas of Concern, such as the White Lake Area of Concern in Michigan that involved sediment cleanup; preventing invasive species; and reducing nutrient runoff. EPA officials told GAO that the Task Force created additional subgroups to identify all GLRI work and funding beginning in 2015.

The Task Force has made some information about GLRI project activities and results available to Congress and the public in three accomplishment reports. In addition, the individual Task Force agencies collect information on activities and results, although this information is not collected and reported by EPA. The conference report accompanying the Department of the Interior Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2010 directed EPA to establish a process to ensure monitoring and reporting on the progress of the GLRI. EPA created the Great Lakes Accountability System (GLAS) to monitor and report on GLRI progress, but some GLAS data are inaccurate, in part, because EPA did not provide clear guidance on entering certain information and GLAS did not have data quality controls. According to EPA officials, the agency replaced GLAS and, in May 2015, began an initial period of data entry into the new system. EPA also provided guidance on entering information into the new system and plans to establish data control activities for ensuring the reliability of the new system. Fully implementing these control activities should ensure that EPA can have confidence that the system can produce data that are accurate and complete.