

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-841T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Great Lakes, which contain much of North America's freshwater supply, provide economic and recreational benefits to millions of people. They face significant stresses, however, that have caused ecological and economic damage. Decades of industrial activity in the region, for example, left a legacy of contamination that resulted in the United States and Canada identifying, since 1987, 43 Areas of Concern.

The GLRI was created in 2010 to, according to EPA, accelerate efforts to protect and restore the Great Lakes. It is overseen by a Task Force of 11 federal agencies that is chaired by the EPA. EPA was directed, in a conference report, to develop a restoration action plan, establish a process to ensure monitoring and reporting on progress, and provide detailed yearly accomplishments.

This testimony is based on GAO reports issued in September 2013 and July 2015. It focuses on (1) GLRI funding, action plans, and reports; (2) the process used to identify GLRI work and funding; and (3) information available about GLRI project activities and results. For the 2015 report, GAO reviewed a sample of 19 GLRI projects funded by the five Task Force agencies that received the majority of GLRI funds, among other things.

What GAO Recommends

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

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

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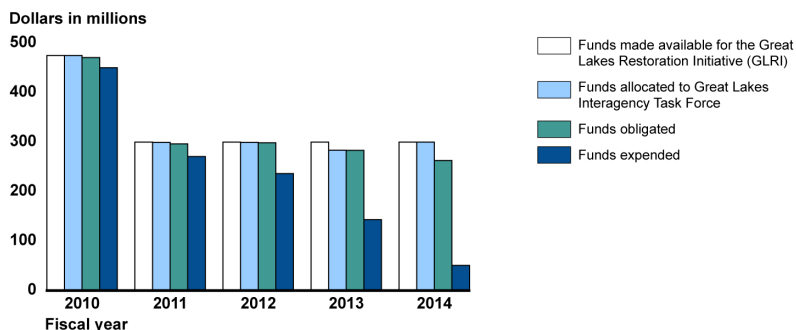
GREAT LAKES RESTORATION INITIATIVE

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

What GAO Found

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

Status of GLRI Funds, FY 2010-2014



Source: GAO analysis of EPA's January 2015 GLRI financial management update reports. | GAO-15-841T

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

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

In July 2015, GAO found that the Task Force has made some information about GLRI project activities and results available to Congress and the public in three accomplishment reports and on its website. In addition, the individual Task Force agencies collect information on activities and results, although this information is not collected and reported by EPA. Of the 19 projects GAO reviewed, 8 reported results directly linked to restoration, such as improved methods for capturing sea lamprey, an invasive species that can kill up to about 40 pounds of fish in its lifetime. The remaining 11 reported results that can be indirectly linked to restoration; that is, the results may contribute to restoration over time. These included results such as simulations and data for helping decision makers make better restoration decisions in light of climate change, as well as education and outreach tools to increase awareness of invasive species.