

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-110](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Population growth and drought are among the factors that have placed increasing demands on the U.S. water supply, particularly in the arid West. The reuse of wastewater can help address water management challenges by treating water that is typically unusable and then reusing it for beneficial purposes, such as irrigation, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Reclamation's Title XVI program awards grants for the study and construction of water reuse projects in 17 western states and Hawaii. From fiscal years 1992 through 2009, Congress individually authorized some Title XVI projects. In 2016, Congress amended the Title XVI program to allow grants to be awarded to additional water reuse projects.

GAO was asked to review the Title XVI program. This report describes, among other things, for the Title XVI program (1) grants Reclamation has awarded for projects and studies and remaining projects that are eligible for grants, (2) the types and locations of projects and studies that have received grants, and (3) Reclamation's process for selecting projects and studies and its consistency with federal grant regulations as well as how the program's evaluation criteria have changed since 2011. GAO reviewed relevant laws, regulations, and agency guidance; analyzed financial data for fiscal years 1992 through 2017; compared documents related to the project selection process against federal grant regulations; and interviewed agency officials and nonfederal project sponsors with different types of projects.

View [GAO-19-110](#). For more information, contact Anne-Marie Fennell at (202) 512-3841 or fennella@gao.gov.

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BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

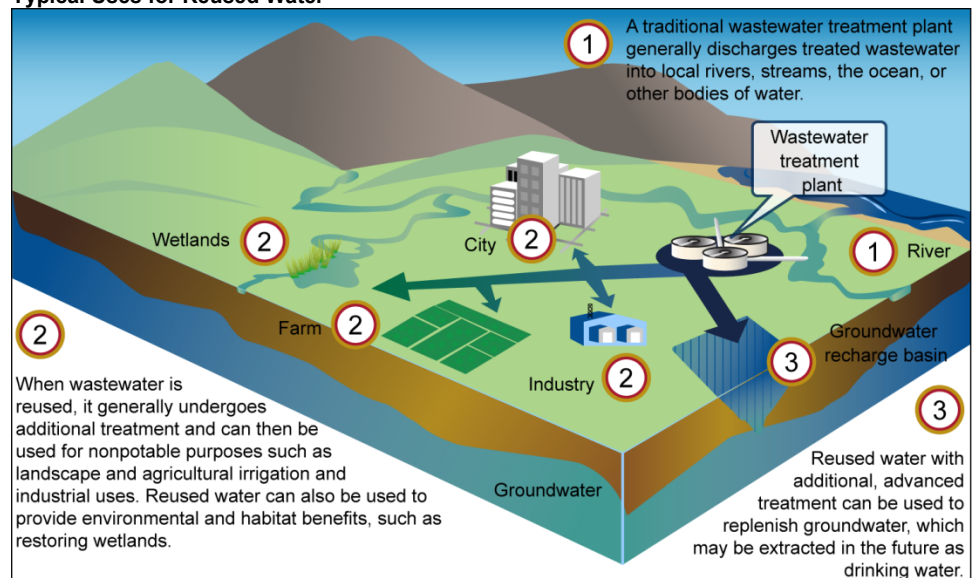
Water Reuse Grant Program Supports Diverse Projects and Is Managed Consistently with Federal Regulations

What GAO Found

The Bureau of Reclamation, within the Department of the Interior, awarded about \$715 million in water reuse grants for 46 construction projects and 71 studies under the Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse Program (Title XVI) from fiscal year 1992 through fiscal year 2017, according to agency documents. Most of the Title XVI funding—about \$703 million—has been awarded for construction projects. Some construction projects remain eligible for Title XVI grant funding. About \$464 million in eligible Title XVI grant funding not yet awarded remains for projects that Congress individually authorized; for projects eligible under the 2016 amendments to the Title XVI program, about \$513 million remains.

Title XVI projects and studies cover various uses for reused water. For example, many projects GAO reviewed produce reused water for landscape and agricultural irrigation, as well as water that may later be extracted for drinking water, as shown in the figure. Title XVI projects are located in western urban and rural areas, with California accounting for 36 construction projects.

Typical Uses for Reused Water



Source: GAO analysis of information from reports on water reuse. | GAO-19-110

Reclamation's process to select Title XVI projects and studies to receive grants involves announcing the funding opportunity, establishing criteria to evaluate potential projects, and reviewing applications to make award decisions, according to agency documents GAO reviewed. GAO found that Reclamation's grant award process is consistent with relevant federal regulations for awarding grants. For example, the Title XVI funding opportunity announcements GAO reviewed contained information required by the regulations, such as the criteria used to evaluate applications. In recent years, Reclamation has changed the criteria it uses to evaluate projects, eliminating or adding some criteria and changing the weighting of others. Reclamation officials said that these changes were made in part in response to statutory changes.