

A report to the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Border Management, Federal Workforce and Regulatory Affairs, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate.

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What GAO Found

The Department of the Interior has a goal to improve data sharing, which is vital to its oversight of oil and gas development on federal and Tribal lands. Three bureaus within Interior share oversight responsibilities—the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Office of Natural Resources Revenue. Interior and the bureaus have reported spending about \$206 million since 2021 to modernize data systems. However, GAO identified challenges in three selected business processes—leasing land for oil and gas exploration, verifying that production is reported accurately, and reviewing bonds to ensure they are sufficient to cover cleanup costs. For example:

- **Manual data sharing.** To update data on oil and gas leases, BIA receives lease data in paper documents from companies that it then manually enters into its data system. BIA then emails or mails these data to other Interior bureaus, whose staff must manually enter the data into their systems.
- **Inability to accept electronic data.** To help ensure accurate royalty payments for extraction of natural gas, BLM verifies selected gas analysis reports submitted by operators. Since 2019, federal regulations have required operators to submit these reports electronically to BLM’s Gas Analysis Reporting and Verification System. However, this system has never been operational, and BLM has discontinued estimating when it will be. As a result, BLM manually collects data from operators as needed and still does not have a system to receive and store reports and data automatically.

Oil and Gas Data-Sharing Challenges Identified at the Department of the Interior

Business process	Bureau of Indian Affairs	Bureau of Land Management	Office of Natural Resources Revenue
Leasing	• Manual data sharing	• Manual data sharing	• Manual data sharing
Production verification	N/A	• Manual data sharing • Data not accepted by systems	No challenges identified
Reviewing bonds	• Data not accepted by systems	• Manual data sharing	N/A

Legend: N/A = not applicable. The bureau does not perform this business process.

Source: GAO analysis of Interior data systems. | GAO-26-106475

Note: Some automated data sharing may also be used for other aspects of these business processes.

Interior issued a 2023 data-sharing policy that targeted further enhancements across the department. However, this strategy does not have time frames and measurable performance goals for improving data sharing. Accordingly, Interior does not know when needed improvements will materialize. Without enhanced automated data sharing, highly inefficient and error-prone manual processes will continue unabated.

Interior and its oil and gas bureaus have generally followed internal data governance policies but have not completed data-sharing agreements as required by Interior policy. These agreements are supposed to guide how officials use and manage shared data. They also could help officials address the inherent challenges of manual processing. Without such agreements, Interior is likely missing opportunities to automate and electronically share information.

Why GAO Did This Study

Development of oil and gas resources on federal lands helps supply the U.S. with energy and generates billions of dollars annually in revenues. Within Interior, selected bureaus use data systems to oversee oil and gas development, such as by issuing drilling permits and inspecting wells.

GAO was asked to review Interior’s oil and gas data systems. This report (1) describes data sharing challenges, (2) examines Interior’s plans for improving data sharing, and (3) examines the extent to which Interior followed policies for data sharing.

GAO reviewed three selected oil and gas business processes that Interior uses. GAO examined data system documentation and interviewed officials who carry out these three business processes to identify challenges. GAO reviewed agency data-sharing policies, documentation, and strategy documents and interviewed system administrators and agency leadership.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Interior (1) develop a strategy with measurable goals and time frames to improve oil and gas data sharing, including the retirement of manual processes and electronic acceptance of key oversight data; and (2) adhere to Interior policy to document data-sharing agreements. Interior’s audit liaison concurred with our findings and recommendations via email.