In 2002, GAO reported that while the National Management Plan calls for many actions that are likely to contribute to preventing and controlling invasive species in the United States, it does not clearly articulate specific long-term goals toward which the government should strive. For example, it is not clear how implementing the actions in the plan will move national efforts toward outcomes such as reducing new invasive species by a specific number or reducing the spread of established species by a specific amount. Moreover, GAO found that the federal government had made little progress in implementing many of the actions called for by the plan. Reasons for the slow progress included delays in establishing teams to be responsible for guiding implementation of the planned actions, the low priority given to implementation by the National Invasive Species Council and federal agencies, and the lack of funding and staff responsible for doing the work.

In addition, GAO reported that current federal efforts are not adequate to prevent the introduction of invasive species into the Great Lakes via the ballast water of ships. Although federal officials believe more should be done to protect the Great Lakes from ballast water discharges, their plans for doing so depend on the development of standards and technologies that will take many years.

More recently, state officials who responded to GAO’s survey, identified a number of gaps in, or problems with, existing legislation addressing invasive species and other barriers to managing invasives. Many state officials identified a lack of legal requirements for controlling invasive species that are already established or widespread as a key gap in legislation addressing both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. State officials also often recognized ineffective standards for ballast water as a major problem in aquatics legislation. Regarding barriers to managing invasive species, state officials identified a lack of federal funding for state invasive species efforts, public education and outreach, and cost-effective control measures as major problems. State officials’ opinions varied on the preferred leadership structure for managing invasive species and whether to integrate legislative authority on terrestrial invasive species with legislation on aquatic invasives.