



Highlights of [GAO-05-185](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Resources, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Invasive weeds, native or nonnative plant species, cause harm to natural areas such as rangelands or wildlife habitat and economic impacts due to lost productivity of these areas. While the federal investment in combating invasive species is substantial most has been concentrated on agricultural lands, not on natural areas. In this report, GAO describes (1) the entities that address invasive weeds in natural areas and the funding sources they use; (2) federal, state, and local weed management officials' views on the barriers to weed management; and (3) their opinions about how additional resources for weed management could be distributed. GAO limited this study to entities in the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, and California, Colorado, Idaho, Maryland, and Mississippi, and gathered information through interviews of over 90 weed management officials.

What GAO Recommends

Because invasive weed control involves many different types of entities, GAO recommends that the Department of Agriculture collaborate with other federal agencies that have experience managing invasive weeds in administering its new weed program. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Department of the Interior agreed with the findings and supports the recommendation; Agriculture did not provide comments.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-185.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robin Nazzaro at (202) 512-3841, or nazzaror@gao.gov.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Cooperation and Coordination Are Important for Effective Management of Invasive Weeds

What GAO Found

All types of landowners—government and private—are involved in the battle against invasive weeds in natural areas and include federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service, and the National Park Service; state and local agencies such as those responsible for agriculture, natural resources, and transportation; and individuals who manage their lands for a variety of purposes, including production or preservation. In some cases, federal or state laws and regulations require that landowners and managers control specific regulated weeds. In other instances, land managers control weeds—including unregulated ones—to meet their larger responsibilities for natural resource conservation. Weed management entities rely on a wide range of funding sources to carry out their activities. The federal government is the largest source of funding through the general budgets of federal land management agencies and numerous grant programs for natural resource management. State and local agencies and nongovernmental entities often rely on a mix of their own funding, grant resources, and collaboration with other entities or volunteers to implement weed management projects.

Not surprisingly, given the magnitude of the invasive weed problem, federal and nonfederal officials we questioned believed that the lack of consistent and adequate funding limits effective management of the problem. Specifically, some officials commented that funding needs to be consistent from year to year to ensure that invasive weeds are eradicated or kept in check, but available resources for weed management often fluctuate. In addition, some officials said that funding is sometimes received late in the year, beyond the point when effective actions can be taken. Other identified barriers to effective weed management included the requirement to comply with National Environmental Policy Act requirements in order to conduct treatments, a lack of cooperation among entities needed to combat invasive weeds, and a general lack of awareness and public education on the issue.

Posed with the prospect of a new program or funds for addressing invasive weeds, a majority of the federal and nonfederal officials who responded to our question preferred that existing programs be used to disburse additional funds. Several officials noted that a key factor for such an approach is to capitalize on existing relationships among current programs and weed management entities, rather than creating a new program. A majority of officials also believed that an agency within the Department of Agriculture should implement any new program or funding source, but that states should play a key role in determining how funds should be distributed. Some officials noted, however, that certain agencies have different expertise with regard to weeds and knowledge of local weed management entities. As we completed our review, a new law required the creation of a new program to provide funding by the Department of Agriculture for weed management. The law requires that the department rely on reviews by regional, state, and local experts when making funding decisions.