

**GAO**

Resources, Community, and Economic  
Development Division

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**Natural Resources  
Management Issue Area  
Active Assignments**

# Foreword

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This report was prepared primarily to inform Congressional members and key staff of ongoing assignments in the General Accounting Office's Natural Resources Management issue area. This report contains assignments that were ongoing as of July 6, 1995, and presents a brief background statement and a list of key questions to be answered on each assignment. The report will be issued quarterly.

This report was compiled from information available in GAO's internal management information systems. Because the information was downloaded from computerized data bases intended for internal use, some information may appear in abbreviated form.

If you have questions or would like additional information about assignments listed, please contact James Duffus, Director, on (202) 512-7756; or Barry Hill, Associate Director, on (202) 512-9775.

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### RESOURCE PROTECTION MANDATES

**TITLE: EVALUATION OF ALYESKA AND THE JOINT PIPELINE OFFICE ACTIONS TO CORRECT PROBLEMS THAT COULD AFFECT THE SAFETY OF TAPS (140290)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) transports 25% of U.S. domestically produced crude oil. The Depts. of Interior and Trans., EPA, and various state agencies administer TAPS through the Joint Project Office (JPO). A recent engineering study by the Quality Technology Co. (QTC) found 22 deficiencies that could affect TAPS' safe operation.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** For several of the significant deficiencies identified by the QTC study, determine (1) what progress Alyeska Pipeline Service Co., the operator of TAPS, has made in implementing corrective actions, (2) whether these actions will address the deficiencies, (3) JPO's monitoring actions and their long-term impact, and (4) if possible, identify the root causes.

**TITLE: MANAGEMENT OF OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE ON BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT AND FOREST SERVICE LAND (140693)**

**BACKGROUND :** Since the 1960's, off-highway vehicles (OHV) have been used extensively on Forest Service and Bureau of Land Mgt (BLM) lands. FS and BLM are tasked with providing OHV recreational opportunities and minimizing adverse land effects. This is complicated by lack of reliable data, funding, and staff resources and differences in type and extent of activity, terrain, soil types, weather, etc.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Q1. How effectively are BLM and the Forest Service managing off-highway vehicles on their lands? Q2. How effectively are BLM and the Forest Service mitigating any adverse effects caused by off-highway vehicles on their lands?

### RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

**TITLE: BUREAU OF RECLAMATION'S ANIMAS-LA PLATA PROJECT (140893)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Animas-La Plata project (ALP) was authorized in 1968 to provide water for Indian and non-Indian irrigators and municipalities in Colorado and New Mexico. In 1988, it was incorporated into an Indian Water Rights Settlement Act (PL 100-585). Construction has been delayed by a court order until the Bureau of Reclamation revises its draft supplemental environmental impact statement.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) Does the "reasonable and prudent alternative" developed by Reclamation meet the regulatory definition for this term under the Endangered Species Act's implementing regulations? (2) Did Reclamation and the Fish and Wildlife Service consider factors in addition to the best scientific and commercial data in developing the "reasonable and prudent alternative"?

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### **EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT**

**TITLE: CORPS OF ENGINEERS' FLOOD PROTECTION EFFORTS FOR THE 1993 MIDWEST FLOOD IN THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI AND MISSOURI RIVER BASINS (140886)**

**BACKGROUND :** In 1993, heavy, prolonged rains and flooding in the Upper Mississippi and Missouri River basins caused widespread suffering, property, and other economic damage. In all, about 1,100 of 1,600 of the private, nonfederal and federal levees on these rivers or their tributaries were overtopped or breached. About 25 percent of the 239 federally built levees were affected.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) To what extent have federal levees prevented flooding and reduced flood damage in 1993? (2) Are levees contributing to record flood heights and increased damages? (3) What is the extent of federal and state control over the design, placement, construction and maintenance of nonfederal levees? (4) Summarize data from the recent White House floodplain report.

### **ADDITIONAL REVENUES**

**TITLE: LINEAR RIGHTS-OF-WAY ON FOREST SERVICE LAND (140332)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Forest Service has about 68,000 special use permits which generate about \$26 million per year in fees. Prior GAO reports indicated that the fees the Forest Service charged ski area operators and communication site operators did not represent fair market value. Whether the fees for other permits represent fair market value is also in question.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Question 1. What are the methods used to establish special use permit fees, especially those for the transmission of commodities such as water, oil and gas, and electricity? Question 2. Do the fees charged represent fair market value? Question 3. If the fees do not represent fair market value, what changes to the fee system are needed?

### **IMPROVING EFFICIENCY**

**TITLE: TRENDS IN FEDERAL LAND OWNERSHIP AND REGULATION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY THROUGH LEGISLATIVE OR ADMINISTRATIVE MANDATE (140101)**

**BACKGROUND :** Federal natural resource agencies have acquired millions of acres of land in past years, plus they exercise regulatory control over millions of acres of private property for the purpose of protecting the environment. Concerns have been raised about the government's methods of acquiring land and over the increase in the amount of land that has come under federal control. This is a follow-on to our report entitled **FEDERAL LANDS: Information on Land Owned and On Acreage with Conservation Restrictions (GAO/RCED-95-73 F)**

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Q1: What are the trends and major reasons for changes in the land owned or otherwise controlled by the federal government? Q2: What have been the primary methods used by the federal government to acquire land? Q3: What have been the trends in the amount of private property that has come under the regulatory control of the federal government?

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### **IMPROVING EFFICIENCY**

**TITLE: AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION REGARDING PRIVATE PROPERTY AFFECTED BY WETLANDS AND ENDANGERED SPECIES REGULATION (140104)**

**BACKGROUND :** Federal natural resource agencies have established regulations for protecting wetlands and endangered species. Concerns have been raised about the extent to which these regulations impact the use of private property. We were asked to identify the number of private property acres which are impacted by these regulations.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Q1: What data do federal land management agencies have regarding the number of private property acres impacted by wetlands and endangered species regulations? Q2: How many acres of private property have been identified as being impacted by these regulations?

**TITLE: IDENTIFICATION AND USE OF NON-APPROPRIATED FUNDS BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (140334)**

**BACKGROUND :** Individual park units collect monies from various sources (entrance fees, concessioner fees etc.) which may be retained by the park for its own use. These "non-appropriated funds" may be used for repairs and maintenance within the parks or for other purposes. Our February 9, 1995, testimony disclosed financial management weaknesses at the National Park Service.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Ques. 1. What are the sources of Park Service non-appropriated funds, how much of these funds does each park receive, and what are the statutory bases for the funds. Ques. 2. How are these funds being used? Ques. 3. Are expenditures in accordance with applicable laws and guidelines?

**TITLE: COMPARISON OF FEDERAL AND STATE TIMBER SALE PROGRAMS (140529)**

**BACKGROUND :** In early 1995, congressional oversight hearings dealing with the management of the Forest Service's and BLM's timber sale programs raised concerns that state timber sale programs are much more efficient and less costly than federal programs.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) How do state timber sales programs operate compared to federal timber sale programs? (2) What factors cause the Forest Service and BLM timber sale receipts to be reduced or make their costs higher than state programs?

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### **ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT**

**TITLE: THE ADMINISTRATION'S DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT (140525)**

**BACKGROUND :** The 4 primary land management agencies have announced a new approach to natural resources management--ecosystem management--to provide better resource protection, ensure sustainable use, and avoid intractable conflicts over resources. The Administration has created an interagency task force and identified pilot projects to examine implementation issues.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) Are the findings and recommendations of the Task Force consistent with the experiences in the locations designated by the Task Force as "survey and assist" areas? (2) To what extent has the Task Force addressed the issues identified by GAO, such as clarifying ecosystem management goals and policies and addressing obstacles to ecosystem management?

### **MEETING PRODUCTION/PRESERVATION MANDATES**

**TITLE: REVIEW OF THE ANIMAL DAMAGE CONTROL (ADC) PROGRAM (140100)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Department of Agriculture's Animal Damage Control (ADC) Program controls predatory animals and the damage they cause, primarily to livestock. Although ADC has shifted from eradicating predator species to selectively killing only problem animals and using non-lethal methods, questions regarding the program's mission and effectiveness continue.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Q1: For fiscal years 1991-1994, what livestock predator control activities were conducted? Q2: Are these activities being carried out in accordance with ADC's policies and procedures? Q3: To what extent is the research performed by ADC used in its field operations? Q4: Are there alternatives for carrying out livestock predation control activities?

**TITLE: REVIEW OF ACTIONS TAKEN AND COSTS INCURRED TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT RECOVERY PLANS FOR SPECIES PROTECTED UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (140103)**

**BACKGROUND :** GAO has been requested to develop information regarding how the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service assess the costs of species "recovery" under the Endangered Species Act. The Act generally requires that both Services prepare a recovery plan for listed species, including an estimate of the timeframe to achieve recovery as well as funding needed.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** For a selection of listed species recovery plans, determine the following: (Q1) What is the total estimated recovery cost as stated in the recovery plan? (Q2) What process did the team preparing the recovery plan employ to estimate the species recovery costs? (Q3) How much has been spent to date to achieve recovery plan goals?

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### MEETING PRODUCTION/PRESERVATION MANDATES

**TITLE: FOLLOW UP REVIEW OF NPS EFFORTS TO SERVE INCREASING NUMBERS OF VISITORS AND PRESERVE AND PROTECT RESOURCES (140329)**

**BACKGROUND :** We recently provided testimony on the condition and trend of natural and cultural resources and visitor services at 12 National Park Service units (GAO/T-RCED-95-124). At the hearing we were asked to prepare a report on the results of our review and to include answers to two specific questions raised at the hearing.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What are the process and criteria NPS uses to distribute its servicewide operating funds among regions and parks? (2) How are park units' and regional offices' operating budgets and project priorities established?

**TITLE: BUDGETING FOR REFORESTATION ACTIVITIES (140523)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are charged with reforesting public lands that have been harvested through timber sales. In fiscal year 1993, the agencies reforested about 500,000 acres of land. The Forest Service primarily uses trust funds to reforest harvested lands while BLM relies on appropriations for its reforestation funding.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) How do the Forest Service and BLM budget for and administer reforestation funds? (2) What is the amount of reforestation funding used to support the agencies' overhead and what is it used for? (3) What key issues affect the reforestation funding?

**TITLE: FACTORS AFFECTING FOREST SERVICE'S SALVAGE SALES (140530)**



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### MEETING PRODUCTION/PRESERVATION MANDATES

**TITLE: GLEN CANYON DAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (140896)**

### OTHER I.A. WORK - NATURAL RESOURCES MGMT

**TITLE: PROPOSED TERMINATION OF BUREAU OF MINES MANUFACTURING AND SALE OF REFINED HELIUM (140294)**

**BACKGROUND :** Interior's Bureau of Mines is responsible for manufacturing and selling refined helium to federal agencies with major needs. Congress is considering terminating this responsibility.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** What steps need to be taken to terminate the Bureau of Mines manufacturing and sale of refined helium?

**TITLE: ABANDONED HARD ROCK MINE SITES ON PUBLIC LANDS--NUMBER, TYPE, AND COST TO RECLAIM (140295)**

**BACKGROUND :** One unresolved issue in the mining reform debate is the extent of damage caused by abandoned hard rock mines on public lands in the West. Several public and private groups have studied the issue, including GAO, the Department of the Interior, the Western Governor's Association, and the Mineral Policy Center.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. What is the approximate number of abandoned hard rock mine sites on public land? 2. What type are the abandoned mine sites (e.g. open tunnels, acid drainage)? 3. What would be the approximate cost to reclaim the sites?

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### **OTHER I.A. WORK - NATURAL RESOURCES MGMT**

**TITLE: UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO REQUIREMENTS OF THE NATIONAL INDIAN FOREST RESOURCES MANAGEMENT ACT (P.L. 101-630) (140336)**

**BACKGROUND :** P.L. 101-630 directed the Secretary of the Interior to assess Indian forest resources and implement a multiple-use approach to managing such resources. Over \$25 million annually is appropriated for Indian forestry programs. A key goal of the act is to assure that tribal priorities are reflected in forest management plans.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Q1. What is the status of the implementation of the Indian Forestry Management Act of 1990? Q2. What problems or constraints are impeding the act's implementation?

**TITLE: DISTRIBUTION OF FOREST SERVICE TIMBER SALE REVENUES (140526)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Forest Service annually receives almost \$1 billion in timber sale revenues but most of these revenues are dedicated to programs such as reforestation and road credits and do not flow through the appropriations process. The requester is concerned that the fiscal health of the timber sale program may be worse than current studies indicate.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What were the revenues earned on the timber sale program for FY 92-94? (2) How much of these revenues were dedicated (earmarked) for such programs as road credits, reforestation, or payments to states? (3) How much of the total revenues were available to cover timber sale preparation and administration costs after the revenues were dedicated?

**TITLE: SUBSIDIES ASSOCIATED WITH BUREAU OF RECLAMATION WATER PROJECTS AND REPAYMENT STATUS OF THESE PROJECTS (140895)**

**BACKGROUND :** Reclamation laws subsidize federal water users by limiting the project construction costs they pay. Congress recently enacted laws to restrict the subsidies and recover more of the Federal investment. The requestor believes users are repaying only a small portion of project costs and that the Bureau of Reclamation has not aggressively implemented the laws.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. What subsidies to water users are associated with Bureau projects? 2. What is the status of repayment of the projects? 3. Is the Bureau managing repayment effectively?

