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**Natural Resources
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Active Assignments**

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Foreword

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 October 2, 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 Barry Hill, Acting Director, on (202) 512-9775.

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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"?

INCREASING 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 permit fees for linear rights-of-way represent fair market value is also in question.

KEY QUESTIONS : Question 1: What are the methods used to establish special use permit fees for linear rights-of-way uses such as oil and gas pipelines, powerlines, and telephone/fiber-optic lines? 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: IDENTIFICATION OF OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE LAND MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS (140296)

BACKGROUND : Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and National Park Service (NPS); and Agriculture's Forest Service (FS) administer 96 percent of the 650 million acres of federal owned land--most in the western states and Alaska. They manage for development of natural resources, conservation, preservation, and recreation.

KEY QUESTIONS : Where these agencies perform common functions such as law enforcement, fire control and permitting, we will determine whether duplication exists and if the functions can be more efficiently and effectively done through alternatives such as privatizing or by having one agency perform the function for all.

TITLE: REVIEW OF INTERIOR AND FOREST SERVICE BUDGET FORMULATION AND EXECUTION PRACTICES (140297)

BACKGROUND : The Department of Interior requested about \$9.6 billion and the Forest Service about \$2.9 billion to execute their programs during fiscal year 1996. This represented only about a 5 percent and .5 percent reduction respectively from these agencies' requests in fiscal year 1995. Further reductions are anticipated during future fiscal years.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1: How do the agencies formulate their budgets and track appropriation expenditures?
Q2: Can Interior and Forest Service budgets be further reduced beyond the amounts requested?

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?

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IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

TITLE: REVIEW OF FOREST SERVICE MANAGEMENT OF SPECIAL USE PERMITS FOR COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES (140337)

BACKGROUND : The Forest Service authorizes a wide variety of commercial activities on National Forest lands through special use permits. Our previous reports on special uses--communications sites and ski areas--found that the permits are not well managed and they are not receiving fair market value as required by law.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1:How does the Forest Service assure that it receives fair market value for commercial activities authorized under special use permits? Q2:Is the Forest Service managing these activities in a business-like manner? Q3:What changes could the Forest Service make to improve its efficiency and effectiveness in managing these activities?

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?

FEDERAL/NONFEDERAL MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

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?

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FEDERAL/NONFEDERAL MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

TITLE: REVIEW OF FOREST SERVICE LAND MANAGEMENT DECISION MAKING PROCESS (140531)

BACKGROUND : The Forest Service is responsible for managing more than one-third of federal land. The National Forest Management Act requires it to accommodate a variety of uses, such as logging and recreation. Additionally, numerous other laws such as the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act impose constraints and mandates on how it manages its lands.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What is the agency's current decision making process for determining how it manages its land? (2) What problems are there with this process? (3) How do recent agency proposals address these problems? (4) What proposals or considerations raised by others are important to consider?

PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION REQUIREMENTS

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 the 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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PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION REQUIREMENTS

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)

BACKGROUND : The catastrophic 1994 wildfires as well as forest health issues surrounding the nation's national forests raise concern about the Forest Service's ability to capture the salvage value of dead and dying timber before the timber suffers further degradation.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) what is the basis for Forest Service's estimates of the volume of salvageable timber? (2) what key factors impede the Forest Service's ability to prepare and sell salvage sales? (3) what are the adverse impacts of the impediments on the salvage sale program?

TITLE: GLEN CANYON DAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (140896)

BACKGROUND : The Congress enacted PL 102-575 to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Grand Canyon. The act requires the Secretary of the Interior to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) that sets forth operating procedures for the Glen Canyon Dam. The Comptroller General is required to audit the costs and benefits contained in the above EIS.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) How did Reclamation determine the impact on downstream resources of various flow alternatives for Glen Canyon Dam? (2) What changes did Reclamation make to the draft EIS based on comments received from concerned parties? (3) What is the position of key organizations and agencies on the final EIS?

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OTHER I.A. WORK - NATURAL RESOURCES MGMT

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?

TITLE: EFFORTS BY THE PARK SERVICE TO IDENTIFY AND MITIGATE INTERNAL THREATS (140333)

BACKGROUND : In January 1994, we reported on the National Park Service's (NPS) efforts to identify and mitigate external threats to park resources. We found NPS did not know the cause or extent of external threats nor were they mitigating those identified. This effort will reveal what NPS knows about internal threats, such as those caused by visitors, and what it is doing to mitigate them.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q.1. What has been done to identify internal threats? Q.2. What are the internal threats to park resources? Q.3. What resources have been damaged by internal threats and what is the extent of the damage? Q.4. Have internal threats increased/decreased over the past decade? Q.5. What is being done to mitigate identified internal threats?

TITLE: DETAILS TO KEY MANAGEMENT POSITIONS, ASSOCIATED COSTS FOR DETAILED STAFF, AND THE NUMBER OF VACANT POSITIONS IN THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (140340)

BACKGROUND : The Bureau of Indian Affairs employs over 13,000 employees, many in isolated locations. Key local positions, such as agency superintendents and area directors, and headquarters policy positions are sometimes difficult to fill. As a result, personnel are detailed to such positions in an acting role until the position is filled permanently.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1. How many details and detailees to key management positions have there been in the last 5 years? Q2. What are the travel and per diem costs associated with details to key management positions? Q3. What has the pattern of vacant positions been in the Bureau?

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OTHER I.A. WORK - NATURAL RESOURCES MGMT

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?
