



Highlights of [GAO-05-211](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Resources, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Currently there are more than 1,260 species listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. While few species have gone extinct since 1973, only 9 have been “recovered” or removed from the list because they no longer need the act’s protection. This has raised questions about how the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) allocates its recovery funds. Proponents of the act believe that the Service’s recovery funds are only a small fraction of what is needed to make greater recovery progress.

The act and agency guidelines require the Service to prioritize species to guide recovery fund allocation. In fiscal year 2000 through 2003, the Service spent \$127 million dollars in recovery funds attributable to individual species. In this report, GAO analyzed (1) the extent to which the Service’s allocation of recovery funds compares with its recovery priority guidelines and (2) what factors influence the Service’s recovery allocation decisions.

What GAO Recommends

To help ensure that the Service is making the best use of available recovery resources, GAO is recommending that the Service periodically assess the extent to which higher priority species receive recovery funds and report this information publicly. The Department of the Interior agreed with GAO’s findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-211.

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.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

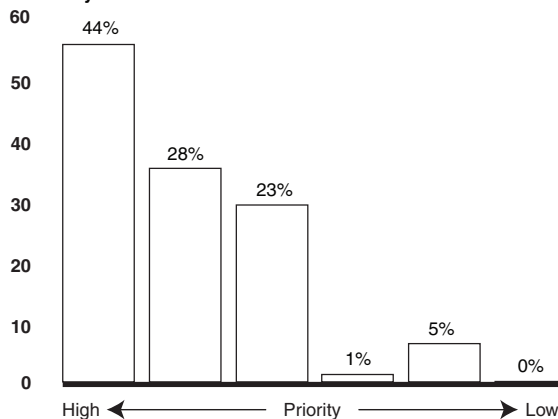
Fish and Wildlife Service Generally Focuses Recovery Funding on High-Priority Species, but Needs to Periodically Assess Its Funding Decisions

What GAO Found

The Service spent its recovery funds in a manner generally consistent with species priority in fiscal years 2000 through 2003, spending almost half (44 percent) of the \$127 million on the highest priority species (see figure below). Species in the next two highest priority groups received almost all of the remaining recovery funds (51 percent). Species in the three lowest priority groups received very little funding (6 percent). Most listed species (92 percent) are in the top three priority groups.

When Service officials allocate recovery funds, they base their decisions to a significant extent on factors other than a species’ priority ranking. At the headquarters level, a formula that focuses on each region’s workload determines how recovery funds are allocated to regional offices. Each regional office allocates its recovery funds to their field offices differently, but in no case is priority ranking the driving factor. Instead, regional officials focus primarily on opportunities for partnerships, though they told us that they also focus on species facing the gravest threats. Field office staff we spoke with emphasized the importance of pursuing funding partnerships in order to maximize their scarce recovery funds. The Service does not know the effect of these disparate allocation systems because it does not have a process to routinely measure the extent to which it is spending its recovery funds on higher priority species. While we found that for fiscal years 2000 through 2003 the Service spent a majority of its recovery funds on high priority species, without periodically assessing its funding decisions, the Service cannot ensure that it spends its recovery funds on the species that are of the greatest priority and, in cases where it does not, determine whether its funding decisions are appropriate.

Recovery Funds Spent on Species by Priority, Fiscal Years 2000-2003
Recovery dollars in millions



Source: GAO analysis of Fish and Wildlife Service data.

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 percent due to rounding.