

Highlights of [GAO-04-1024](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Great Lakes remain environmentally vulnerable, prompting the United States and Canada to agree on actions to preserve and protect them.

As requested, this report (1) determines the extent to which current EPA monitoring efforts provide information for assessing overall conditions in the Great Lakes Basin, (2) identifies existing restoration goals and whether monitoring is done to track goal progress, and (3) identifies the major challenges to setting restoration goals and developing a monitoring system.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends EPA develop controls to ensure the Great Lakes monitoring system inventory is complete, accurate, and consistent. Also, the Congress may wish to consider clarifying if GLNPO or the task force should lead restoration efforts and require development of measurable basin-wide goals with a monitoring system for measuring progress.

EPA agreed with GAO's recommendation regarding adequate inventory monitoring controls. EPA believes responsibilities and relationships for the task force and GLNPO are clearly stated in the executive order and statute but did not address GAO's concerns about how GLNPO will exercise its leadership and coordination responsibilities.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1024.

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

GREAT LAKES

Organizational Leadership and Restoration Goals Need to Be Better Defined for Monitoring Restoration Progress

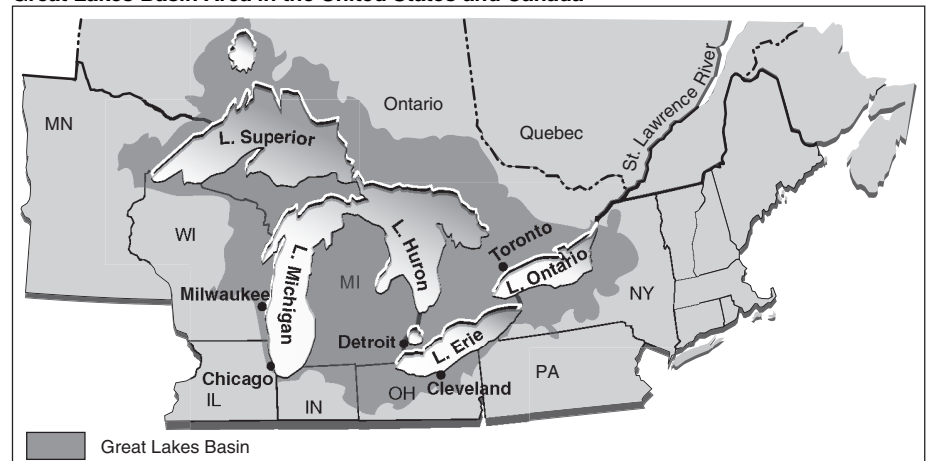
What GAO Found

Current Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) monitoring does not provide the comprehensive information needed to assess overall conditions in the Great Lakes Basin because the required coordinated joint U.S./Canadian monitoring program has not been fully developed. Information collected from monitoring by other federal and state agencies does not, by design, provide an overall assessment of the Great Lakes because it is collected to meet specific program objectives or limited to specific geographic areas.

Multiple restoration goals have been proposed through efforts by EPA and other organizations. EPA developed basin-wide goals through its *Great Lakes Strategy 2002* and goals for plans addressing individual lakes. Other organizations have also identified basin-wide restoration goals and priorities. Monitoring of progress toward goals is generally limited to tracking specific action items proposed in the *Great Lakes Strategy 2002*; other proposed goals are generally not monitored to determine progress.

Efforts to coordinate basin-wide goals and a monitoring system face several challenges. The lack of clearly defined organizational leadership poses a major obstacle. Both EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) and a newly created interagency task force have coordination roles raising uncertainty as to how leadership and coordination efforts will be exercised in the future. Second, coordinating existing restoration goals and monitoring activities among the many participating organizations within the United States, and between the United States and Canada is a significant challenge. Third, centralized information from monitoring activities is not yet available, making it difficult to assess restoration progress. In addition, an inventory system developed by EPA and Canada may not have adequate controls on voluntarily provided information.

Great Lakes Basin Area in the United States and Canada



Source: GAO.