



Highlights of [GAO-05-253](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

As the world's population tripled during the past century, demand for the finite amount of freshwater resources increased six-fold, straining these resources for many countries, including the United States. The United Nations estimates that, worldwide, more than 1 billion people live without access to clean drinking water and over 2.4 billion people lack the basic sanitation needed for human health. Freshwater supply shortages—already evident in the drought-ridden western United States—pose serious challenges and can have economic, social, and environmental consequences.

Multiple federal agencies share responsibility for managing freshwater resources, but consolidated information on the federal government's financial support of these activities is not readily accessible. You asked GAO to determine for fiscal years 2000 through 2004 how much financial support federal agencies provided for freshwater programs in the United States and abroad. For the purposes of this report, freshwater programs include desalination, drinking water supply, flood control, irrigation, navigation, wastewater treatment, water conservation, water dispute management, and watershed management.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-253.

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

FRESHWATER PROGRAMS

Federal Agencies' Funding in the United States and Abroad

What GAO Found

Of the over \$52 billion in total financial support provided by federal agencies for freshwater programs during fiscal years 2000 through 2004, about \$49 billion was directed to domestic programs and about \$3 billion supported programs abroad. Domestic program activities involved 27 federal agencies, but 3 agencies—the Environmental Protection Agency, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of Agriculture's (Agriculture) Rural Utilities Service—accounted for over 70 percent of the financial support. Eighteen agencies supported domestic drinking water supply programs and 16 supported domestic wastewater treatment and watershed management programs. Grant programs of over \$22 billion and direct federal spending of about \$22 billion accounted for most of the domestic financial support. In addition to the about \$49 billion that directly support freshwater activities in the United States, some agencies also have programs that may indirectly support such activities, but it is difficult to determine the dollar value of this indirect support. For example, Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program supports multiple activities, including irrigation, but information on each activity supported by the program is not readily available. Also included in the domestic program is about \$175 million that the United States provided to three commissions that conduct freshwater activities along U.S. borders with Mexico and Canada.

Of the estimated \$3 billion in total financial support directed toward freshwater programs abroad between fiscal years 2000 through 2004, about \$1 billion was recently provided for freshwater projects in Afghanistan and Iraq. Most of the financial support for international freshwater programs was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development. Foreign wastewater treatment and watershed management programs were the ones that most of the agencies supported. The vast majority of the U.S. support for international programs was provided through grants. Not included in the \$3 billion for international support are the contributions that the United States made to the general budgets of numerous international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Bank. The international organizations used some portion of the U.S. contributions to support freshwater activities around the globe.

Federal Agencies' Estimated Obligations for Freshwater Programs in the United States and Abroad, Fiscal Years 2000 through 2004

Dollars in billions



Source: GAO survey of federal agencies' freshwater programs.