

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-97](#), a report to the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Committee on Environment and Public Works, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Through its Civil Works program, the Corps designs, constructs, and maintains federal water resources projects, such as levees for flood risk management. Under certain authorities, nonfederal sponsors, such as states and local governments, may undertake studies or construct projects and may be eligible for reimbursement or credit for the federal share of costs.

GAO was asked to examine federal water resources projects undertaken by nonfederal sponsors. This report examines (1) the authorities enabling nonfederal sponsors to undertake studies or projects, (2) the extent to which such sponsors have undertaken federal projects and the information the Corps has about them, and (3) the Corps' and sponsors' views on lessons learned from projects. GAO reviewed federal laws and agency guidance; collected information about studies and projects led by nonfederal sponsors from 1986 through 2014 from all 38 Corps districts responsible for civil works; and interviewed Corps officials in 16 districts that have overseen at least one such study or project, as well as 20 nonfederal sponsors that have undertaken projects.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Corps develop guidance for accurate recording of transactions and other relevant information about projects undertaken by nonfederal sponsors. The agency agreed with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-17-97](#). For more information, contact Anne-Marie Fennell at (202) 512-3841 or fennella@gao.gov.

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ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Better Guidance Could Improve Corps' Information on Water Resources Projects Undertaken by Nonfederal Sponsors

What GAO Found

Authorities that allow nonfederal sponsors to undertake federal water resources projects, including feasibility studies and construction projects, have been included in various federal statutes since 1968. Until June 2014, when Congress enacted the Water Resources Reform and Development Act, five federal statutory authorities allowed nonfederal sponsors to undertake studies or construction of federal water resources projects such as flood control projects. The 2014 act amended and consolidated prior statutory provisions authorizing water resources projects.

The number of federal water resources projects nonfederal sponsors have undertaken and the amounts they have been reimbursed for the federal share of these projects cannot be reliably determined. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) does not track this information at the headquarters level and has delegated the responsibility for tracking and overseeing such projects to the districts. While Corps headquarters collects information from the districts on reimbursements, the information that headquarters provided GAO did not match the information that the districts provided to GAO. For example, the number of reimbursed projects and the amount of reimbursements made to nonfederal sponsors were inconsistent in the two data sets. Corps headquarters officials could not fully explain why differences existed and could not identify any Corps policies or procedures that provide guidance to the districts on the type of information to collect and maintain on projects led by nonfederal sponsors. Federal standards for internal control call for all transactions and other significant events to be clearly documented, and for accurate and timely recording of transactions and events. Without documented guidance for districts regarding recordkeeping for projects led by nonfederal sponsors, the Corps does not have reasonable assurance that districts will consistently record information on such projects and that the information districts provide to headquarters on these projects will be accurate and reliable.

Corps district officials and nonfederal sponsors GAO interviewed identified several lessons learned from projects undertaken by nonfederal sponsors. For example, officials and nonfederal sponsors frequently cited enhanced partnerships and communication as areas that worked well on projects led by nonfederal sponsors. In contrast, both Corps district officials and nonfederal sponsors cited various challenges in existing Corps guidance. For example, officials noted that Corps guidance does not clearly establish roles and responsibilities for these projects, and nonfederal sponsors said the Corps does not have clear guidance on the project implementation process. The Corps issued implementation guidance for feasibility studies led by nonfederal sponsors in February 2016 in which it clarified that it is generally not authorized to provide assistance to nonfederal sponsors undertaking feasibility studies, except in certain circumstances in which the Corps is permitted to provide limited technical assistance to nonfederal sponsors. The Corps has also developed draft guidance for construction projects led by nonfederal sponsors, which it estimates it will issue later in 2016.