



June 2019

NORTHERN BORDER SECURITY

CBP Identified Resource Challenges but Needs Performance Measures to Assess Security Between Ports of Entry

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-470](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States and Canada share the longest common non-militarized border between two countries, spanning nearly 4,000 miles of land and maritime borders from the states of Washington to Maine. CBP, within DHS, has primary responsibility for securing U.S. borders at and between ports of entry.

GAO was asked to review CBP's efforts to secure the northern border between ports of entry. This report examines, among other things, (1) the staffing and resource challenges that CBP identified and actions it has taken to address those challenges and (2) the extent to which CBP has developed and implemented performance measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. GAO reviewed agency documentation and met with DHS and CBP officials in headquarters and field locations. This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in March 2019. Information that DHS deemed sensitive has been omitted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations, that Border Patrol and AMO each develop and implement performance measures to assess their effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. DHS concurred with both recommendations.

View [GAO-19-470](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gamblierr@gao.gov.

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NORTHERN BORDER SECURITY

CBP Identified Resource Challenges but Needs Performance Measures to Assess Security Between Ports of Entry

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) identified staffing and resource challenges affecting its enforcement activities along the U.S.-Canada (northern) border and actions to address them, but faces competing priorities. The U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) and Air and Marine Operations (AMO) are the components within CBP responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the land, air, and maritime environments. Border Patrol identified an insufficient number of agents that limited patrol missions along the northern border. AMO identified an insufficient number of agents along the northern border, which limited the number and frequency of air and maritime missions. Border Patrol and AMO also identified a variety of resource challenges along the northern border, such as limited radar and surveillance technology coverage and inadequate facilities to process and temporarily hold apprehended individuals. While the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and CBP identified actions to address staffing and resource challenges, it is unknown whether these challenges will be addressed. This is primarily because CBP's priority is to secure the U.S.-Mexico (southwest) border. Issued in January 2017, Executive Order 13767 directed DHS to take actions to secure the southwest border by, among other things, constructing physical barriers and hiring thousands of agents.

Examples of U.S. Border Patrol's Northern Border Areas of Responsibility



U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector



U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector

Source: (Left) GAO; (Right) U.S. Customs and Border Protection. | [GAO-19-470](#)

While CBP has performance measures that assess selected border security operations or programs, some of which include data from the northern border, it does not have specific measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. For example, Border Patrol has performance measures that assess security in remote areas on the northern border, but the measures do not include data from maritime border areas. Developing and implementing such measures could help Border Patrol and AMO better assess the effectiveness of their northern border operations between ports of entry, including addressing challenges due to limited staffing and resources.

Contents

Letter	1	
	Background	5
	CBP Identified Terrorism, Contraband Smuggling, and Violations of U.S. Immigration Law as Threats along the Northern Border Between Ports of Entry	13
	CBP Identified Northern Border Staffing and Resource Challenges and Actions to Address Them but Faces Competing Priorities	17
	CBP Has Not Developed Performance Measures to Assess Its Effectiveness at Securing the Northern Border Between Ports of Entry	27
	Conclusions	31
	Recommendations	31
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	31
<hr/>		
Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology		33
Appendix II: U.S. Border Patrol Northern Border Sector Profiles		42
	Methodology for Developing Sector Profiles	42
<hr/>		
Appendix III: Air and Marine Operations Northern Region Branches		60
Appendix IV: Irregular Northbound Migration from the United States to Canada		65
Appendix V: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security		69
Appendix VI: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgements		73
<hr/>		
Tables		
	Table 1: List of Field Government Agencies/Entities Interviewed	34
	Table 2: U.S. Border Patrol Blaine Sector's Area of Responsibility	44
	Table 3: U.S. Border Patrol Spokane Sector's Area of Responsibility	46
	Table 4: U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector's Area of Responsibility	48
	Table 5: U.S. Border Patrol Grand Forks Sector's Area of Responsibility	50
	Table 6: U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector's Area of Responsibility	52
	Table 7: U.S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector's Area of Responsibility	54
	Table 8: U.S. Border Patrol Swanton Sector's Area of Responsibility	56

Table 9: U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector's Area of Responsibility	58
Table 10: Total Air and Marine Operations Flight and Float Hours by Region, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	61

Figures

Figure 1: Map of U.S. Border Patrol's Sectors along the U.S.-Canada Border	6
Figure 2: Map of Air and Marine Operations Branches and Units along the U.S.-Canada Border	7
Figure 3: Examples of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Use of Resources along the U.S.-Canada Border	9
Figure 4: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Blaine Sector's Area of Responsibility	44
Figure 5: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Blaine Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	45
Figure 6: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Spokane Sector's Area of Responsibility	46
Figure 7: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Spokane Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	47
Figure 8: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector's Area of Responsibility	48
Figure 9: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	49
Figure 10: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Grand Forks Sector's Area of Responsibility	50
Figure 11: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Grand Forks Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	51
Figure 12: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector's Area of Responsibility	52
Figure 13: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	53
Figure 14: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector's Area of Responsibility	54

Figure 15: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	55
Figure 16: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Swanton Sector's Area of Responsibility	56
Figure 17: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Swanton Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	57
Figure 18: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector's Area of Responsibility	58
Figure 19: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017	59
Figure 20: Map of Bellingham Air and Marine Branch's Area of Operations	62
Figure 21: Map of Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch's Area of Operations	63
Figure 22: Map of Manassas Air Branch's Area of Operations	64
Figure 23: Photograph of the U.S.-Canada Border on Roxham Road, Champlain, New York on May 24, 2018	66

Abbreviations

AMO	Air and Marine Operations
Border Patrol	U.S. Border Patrol
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act of 1993
GPRAMA	GPRA Modernization Act of 2010
IT	information technology
OIT	Office of Information and Technology

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June 26, 2019

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
The Honorable Gary Peters
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The United States and Canada share the longest common non-militarized border between two countries, spanning nearly 4,000 miles of land and maritime borders from the states of Washington to Maine. The terrain, which ranges from densely forested lands on the west and east coasts, to open plains in the middle of the country, is composed of both urban and sparsely-populated lands with limited federal, state, and local law enforcement presence along the border. Approximately 2,400 miles of the U.S.-Canada (northern) border consist of waterways, the Great Lakes system, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.¹

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has primary responsibility for securing U.S. borders at and between ports of entry.² Historically, the United States has primarily focused attention and resources on the nearly 2,000-mile U.S. border with Mexico, which continues to experience significantly higher levels of reported drug trafficking and unlawful entry than the northern border. Further, this focus was reiterated in Executive Order 13767, which directed DHS to obtain complete operational control of the U.S.-Mexico (southwest) border.³ Such control was defined in the executive order as

¹The Great Lakes system includes Lakes Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan, and Superior, their connecting waters, and the St. Lawrence River. The U.S.-Canada border includes the 163 miles of maritime border in the Salish Sea, including the Strait of Juan de Fuca, in the Pacific Northwest between the Canadian province of British Columbia and the state of Washington.

²See 6 U.S.C. § 211(a) (establishing CBP within DHS), (c) (enumerating CBP's duties). Ports of entry are facilities that provide for the controlled entry into or departure from the United States. Specifically, a port of entry is any officially designated location (seaport, airport, or land border location) where CBP officers are assigned to clear travelers, merchandise, cargo, and other items; collect duties; enforce customs laws; and inspect persons entering or applying for admission into, or departing, the United States pursuant to U.S. travel controls and immigration law.

³See Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements, Exec. Order No. 13767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8793 (Jan. 30, 2017) (issued January 25).

the prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists or other unlawful (i.e. inadmissible) aliens, and instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband.⁴ Executive Order 13767 also directed DHS to take actions to secure the southwest border between ports of entry, including hiring additional CBP law enforcement personnel and constructing physical barriers along the border. While working towards meeting the requirements of Executive Order 13767, DHS also included improving security along the southwest border of the United States between ports of entry as an agency priority goal in its Annual Performance Report for Fiscal Years 2017-2019.⁵

In June 2018, DHS released a Northern Border Strategy to establish actions that are intended to, among other things, improve DHS's efforts to safeguard the northern border against terrorist and criminal threats.⁶ The strategy states that long stretches of difficult terrain between ports of entry provide potential opportunities for individuals who may pose a national security risk to enter the United States undetected. The strategy notes, however, that encounters with individuals associated with transnational crime or terrorism remain infrequent, and sensor technology plays an important role in locations where full-time deployment of enforcement personnel is not practical. Further, the strategy states that DHS will develop an implementation plan to outline roles, responsibilities, programs, and timelines for accomplishing the strategy's goals and objectives for fiscal years 2020 to 2024. According to the strategy, the implementation plan is intended to identify capability gaps for accomplishing the strategy's goals and objectives, which include, in part,

⁴An alien (i.e., non-U.S. citizen or national) is inadmissible to the United States if they fall within the health-related, criminal or other classes of inadmissibility defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, Pub. L. No. 82-414, tit. II, ch. 2, § 212(a), 66 Stat. 163, 182-87 (1952) (classified, as amended, at 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)).

⁵Department of Homeland Security, *Fiscal Years 2017-2019 Annual Performance Report* (Feb. 5, 2018). Consistent with the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA), the purpose of agency priority goals is to focus leadership priorities, set outcomes, and measure results. The goals should reflect the agency's highest priorities and have targets that can be achieved within 2 years. In fiscal year 2018, DHS added an agency priority goal to enhance southern border security by implementing the operational control framework between ports of entry in all southwest U.S. Border Patrol sectors by the end of fiscal year 2019.

⁶Department of Homeland Security, *Northern Border Strategy* (June 12, 2018). Prior to releasing the most recent Northern Border Strategy, DHS released a public summary of its Northern Border Threat Analysis Report in July 2017. DHS's previous northern border strategy was released in June 2012.

optimizing and appropriately prioritizing CBP technology, equipment, and personnel utilized along the northern border between ports of entry.

You asked us to review CBP's efforts to secure the northern border between ports of entry.⁷ This report addresses the following questions: (1) what threats has CBP identified along the northern border between ports of entry; (2) what challenges, if any, has CBP identified in its staffing and resources to secure the northern border between ports of entry, and what actions, if any, has CBP taken to address those challenges; and (3) to what extent has CBP developed and implemented performance measures to assess the effectiveness of securing the northern border between ports of entry.

This report is a public version of the prior sensitive report that we provided to you in March 2019.⁸ DHS deemed some of the information in the prior report as For Official Use Only—Law Enforcement Sensitive, which must be protected from public disclosure. Therefore, this report omits specific information on threats CBP identified along the northern border, staffing and resource challenges CBP has identified, locations of U.S. Border Patrol's (Border Patrol) reported law enforcement activity and selected technology programs, and locations and frequency of Air and Marine Operations (AMO) missions. Although this report omits sensitive information, it addresses the same questions as the sensitive report.

To address the threats CBP identified along the northern border between ports of entry, we reviewed DHS and CBP policies, procedures, reports, and assessments describing threats along the northern border between ports of entry from fiscal years 2017 and 2018, the most recent fiscal years available at the time of our review. In addition, we met with officials from DHS, CBP, and the government of Canada to obtain their perspectives on threats along the northern border.

To address the challenges CBP identified in its staffing and resources and the actions, if any, it has taken to address them, we reviewed CBP's Fiscal Year 2019 Congressional Budget Justification as well as resource assessments and plans completed from fiscal years 2016 through 2018,

⁷For the purposes of this report, the northern border includes the U.S.-Canada border from the states of Washington to Maine exclusive of the U.S.-Canada border with Alaska.

⁸GAO, *Northern Border Security: CBP Identified Resource Challenges but Needs Performance Measures to Assess Security Between Ports of Entry*, GAO-19-194SU (Washington, D.C.: March 28, 2019).

the most recent years for which information was available at the time of our review. In addition, we interviewed field and headquarters CBP officials and conducted site visits to observe CBP's use of resources—such as surveillance technology, facilities, aircraft, and vessels—in Michigan, New York, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. We chose these locations based on deployment of CBP resources, such as surveillance technology, and reported high levels of illicit cross-border activity. Findings from our observations and interviews during our site visits cannot be generalized to all CBP locations along the northern border, but provide valuable insights into how resources are used for border security operations along the northern border.

To assess the extent to which CBP has developed and implemented performance measures, we reviewed and analyzed documentation that describes DHS and CBP processes for developing and implementing performance measures, to include DHS's Annual Performance Report for Fiscal Years 2017 through 2019 and CBP's Fiscal Year 2019 Congressional Budget Justification. We also reviewed reports, assessments, and strategies that describe current performance measure initiatives and met with DHS and CBP officials in headquarters responsible for developing and implementing performance measures. We compared CBP's actions to develop and implement performance measures to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* and the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Modernization Act of 2010.⁹ Additional details on our scope and methodology are contained in appendix I.

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from October 2017 to March 2019 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.¹⁰ Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable

⁹GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014). See generally, Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), Pub. L. No. 103-62, 107 Stat. 285 (1993) and GPRA Modernization Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-352, 124 Stat. 3866 (2011) (updating GPRA). In 1993, GPRA was enacted to focus federal agencies on performance by requiring agencies to develop long-term and annual goals, and measure and report on process toward those goals annually.

¹⁰GAO-19-194SU.

Overview of CBP's Roles
Background
and Responsibilities

basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We subsequently worked with DHS from March 2019 to June 2019 to prepare this nonsensitive version of the original sensitive report for public release. This public version was also prepared in accordance with these standards.

CBP is the nation's largest federal law enforcement agency. CBP's Border Patrol and AMO are the uniformed law enforcement arms responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the air, land, and maritime environments.¹¹

Border Patrol has primary responsibility for securing U.S. land borders between ports of entry. Its area of responsibility along the northern border is divided among eight sectors: Blaine, Spokane, Havre, Grand Forks, Detroit, Buffalo, Swanton, and Houlton. Each Border Patrol sector is further divided into Border Patrol stations and each station is assigned a certain geographic area of responsibility within a sector.¹² Along the northern border, there are a total of 49 stations or between four to eight stations per sector.¹³ For a map of Border Patrol's northern border sectors, see figure 1. Border Patrol agents secure the border between ports of entry, in part, through patrolling international land borders and waterways to detect and prevent the illegal trafficking of people, narcotics, and contraband into the United States.

¹¹See 6 U.S.C. § 211(e) (establishing and listing duties of the U.S. Border Patrol within CBP), (f) (establishing and listing duties of AMO within CBP).

¹²Although this report focuses on the northern border from Washington to Maine, the Alaskan border with Canada is part of Blaine sector's area of responsibility.

¹³For additional information about Border Patrol's eight northern border sectors, see appendix II.

Figure 1: Map of U.S. Border Patrol's Sectors along the U.S.-Canada Border

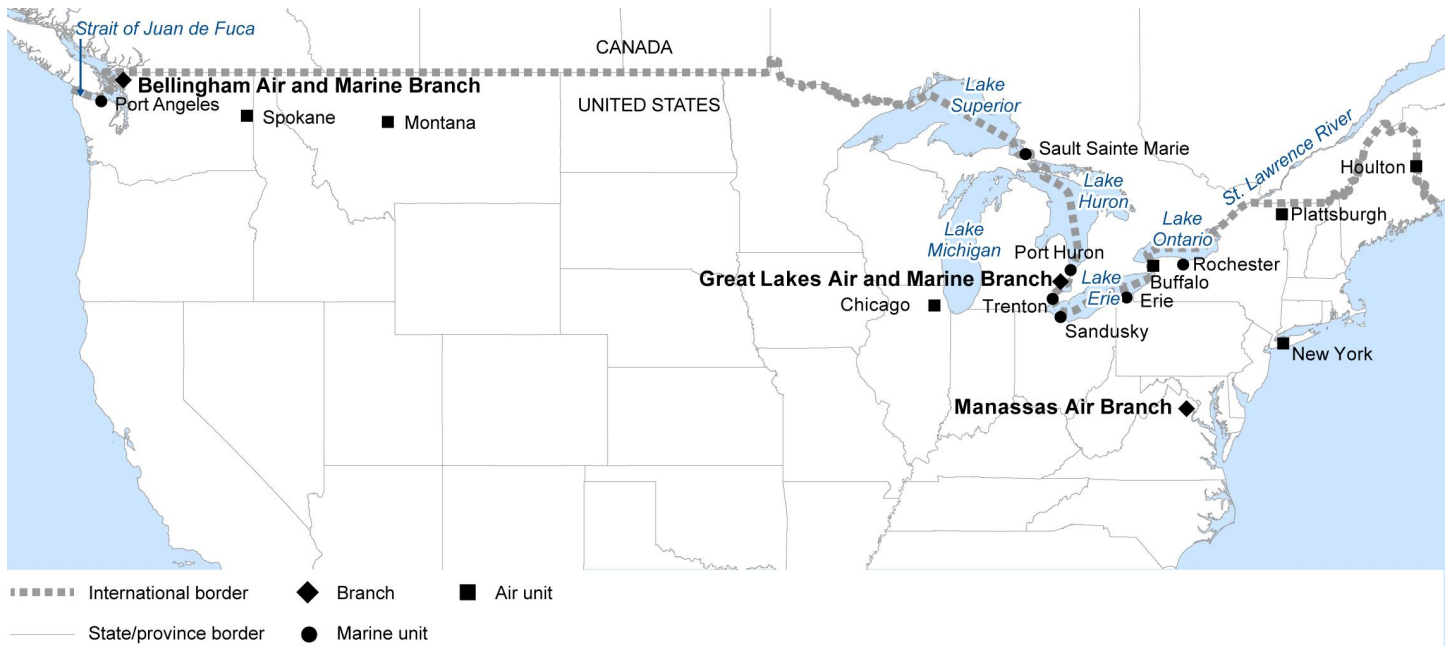


Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

AMO has primary responsibility for securing U.S. borders in the air, marine, and land domains and its operations along the northern border are divided among three branches: Bellingham Air and Marine Branch in Washington, Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch in Michigan, and Manassas Air Branch in Virginia. Each branch is further divided into units to conduct air or maritime missions and there are a total of seven air units and nine marine units along the northern border.¹⁴ For a map of AMO's northern border operating locations, see figure 2. AMO Air Interdiction Agents are federal law enforcement agents who pilot aircraft, while Marine Interdiction Agents are federal law enforcement agents who operate vessels. Air and Marine Interdiction Agents secure the air and maritime environments along the border, in part, through conducting surveillance and investigative activities to interdict smuggled narcotics and other contraband.

¹⁴For additional information about AMO's three northern border branches, see appendix III.

Figure 2: Map of Air and Marine Operations Branches and Units along the U.S.-Canada Border



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: Bellingham Marine Unit is co-located with Bellingham Air and Marine Branch, and the Buffalo Air Unit is co-located with Buffalo Marine Unit.

Additional offices within CBP that support the activities of Border Patrol and AMO along the northern border include the Office of Facilities and Asset Management, Office of Information and Technology (OIT), and Office of Intelligence.

- The Office of Facilities and Asset Management is responsible for oversight and management of CBP’s real and personal property portfolios, including managing CBP’s facilities and motor vehicle fleets.¹⁵
- OIT is responsible for managing CBP’s technology infrastructure and information technology (IT) operations. These, according to OIT, enable CBP mission readiness and improve the ability of all employees, including agents in the field, to be proactive and

¹⁵Real property consists of facilities leased or owned by CBP; personal property consists of CBP assets, such as firearms, badges, and radios; and CBP’s vehicles include, for example, patrol vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and snowmobiles.

responsive to new threats. OIT manages all IT networks, computers, systems, data, tactical communications, and other resources to support CBP employees. OIT is also to provide day-to-day field support primarily through Field Technology Officers who provide services to CBP's offices and components, such as repairing equipment, upgrading systems and networks, restoring system outages, responding to cybersecurity incidents, and deploying new technology and equipment.

- The Office of Intelligence is to develop, coordinate, and implement CBP's intelligence capabilities into a cohesive intelligence enterprise that supports CBP's primary mission to secure the borders while facilitating legitimate trade and travel.¹⁶ The Office of Intelligence's Field Intelligence Division is to provide CBP law enforcement personnel with current and relevant intelligence to inform decision makers and those who respond to border related crimes, threats, and hazards. In this division, there are two field intelligence groups with areas of responsibility along the northern border—the Pacific Northwest Field Intelligence Group in Washington and the Great Lakes Field Intelligence Group in Michigan. In addition, through CBP's National Border Geospatial Intelligence Strategy, the Office of Intelligence produces geospatial intelligence products for Border Patrol sectors to identify areas of potential illicit cross-border activity.

Resources Used by CBP to Secure the Northern Border Between Ports of Entry

Border Patrol and AMO use a variety of technologies, facilities, and other resources to secure the northern border between ports of entry. Figure 3 illustrates examples of resources used by Border Patrol and AMO, which include the following:

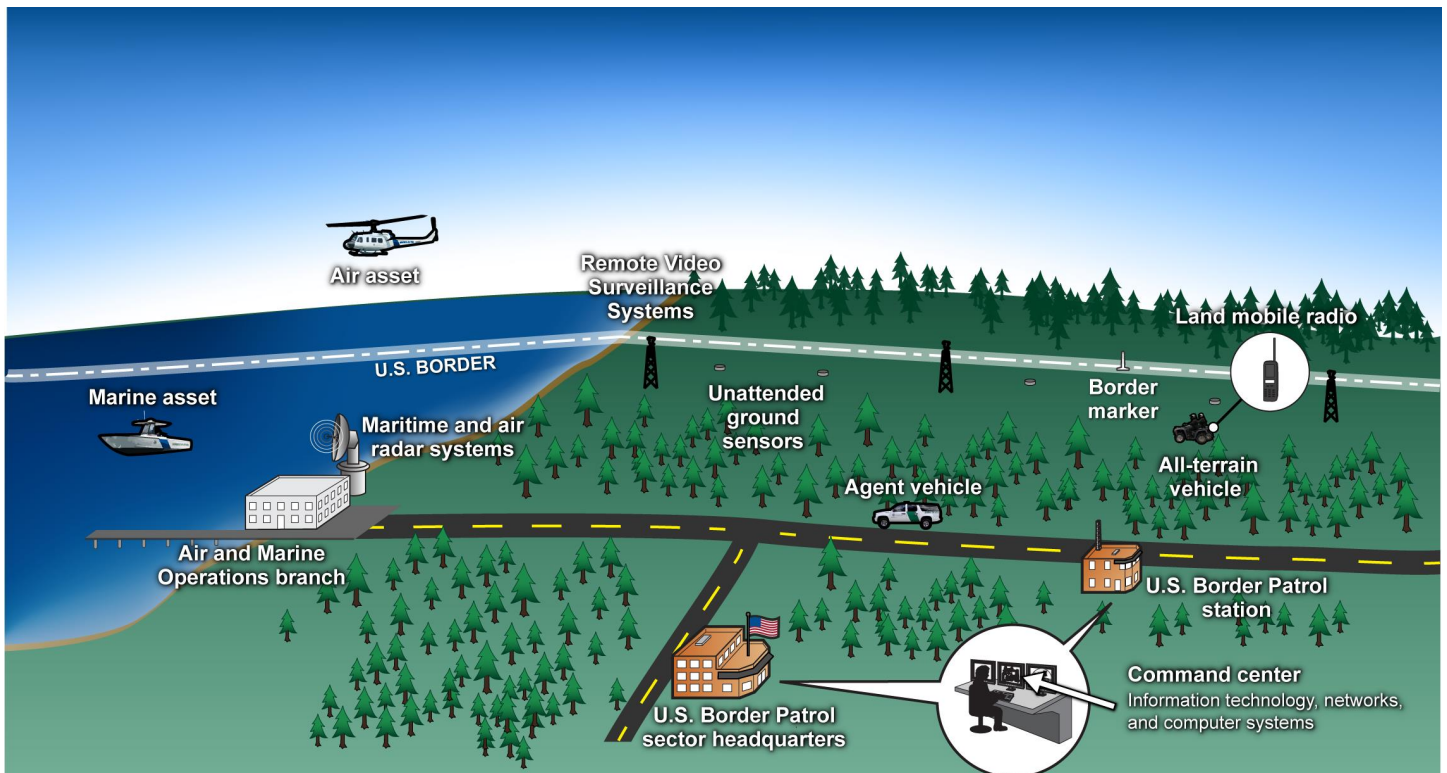
- surveillance technology, such as Remote Video Surveillance Systems—systems of towers with cameras that transmit information to video monitors at a Border Patrol facility—and unattended ground sensors—remotely monitored sensors placed in or on the ground, or on ground-based platforms, to detect, track, identify, and differentiate humans, animals, and vehicles—used by Border Patrol agents to detect and identify illicit cross-border activity;
- radar systems to detect and identify aircraft and vessel incursions;
- IT and communication systems to conduct operations and ensure the safety and security of agents while on duty, including databases and systems for processing detainees, infrastructure to operate

¹⁶See 6 U.S.C. § 211(h) (establishing and listing duties of the Office of Intelligence within CBP).

surveillance technology, and tactical communication equipment such as land mobile radios;

- aircraft, including fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles, and large and small vessels;
- tactical infrastructure, including fencing, roads, and border markers and signs; and
- facilities, including buildings to house workstations and offices for agents and civilian personnel, short-term detention facilities to process and hold individuals arrested by Border Patrol agents, forward operating bases in remote locations to support Border Patrol agent operations, and hangars for aircraft and vessel storage and repair.

Figure 3: Examples of U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s Use of Resources along the U.S.-Canada Border



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection information. | GAO-19-470

Note: Maritime and air radar systems shown above are two separate systems. The International Boundary Commission, under treaty between the United States and Canada, maintains a clear cut of vegetation or vista, also known as the “slash,” along the U.S.-Canada border.

**Collaborative Efforts Used
by CBP to Secure the
Northern Border**

CBP participates in a variety of collaborative efforts—including task forces, joint operations, and partnerships with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies—to support its efforts to secure the northern border between ports of entry.¹⁷ According to CBP officials, collaborative efforts involve sharing intelligence and other information that informs and guides the efficient use of agents and resources to conduct enforcement activities. For example, AMO’s Air and Marine Operations Center coordinates with federal, state, local, and international law enforcement agencies to detect, identify, track, and coordinate interdiction of suspect aviation and maritime activity near and at the borders, including the northern border, and within the United States.¹⁸ Moreover, Border Patrol’s Northern Border Coordination Center serves as a centralized coordination center for information sharing among Border Patrol’s eight northern border sectors, as well as with domestic and international law enforcement partners, focusing primarily on counter-terrorism and illicit criminal networks.¹⁹

Border Patrol also collaborates with county, state, tribal, local, and other law enforcement agencies through administration of the Operation Stonegarden Grant Program, a part of the Homeland Security Grant Program, to support border security activities. The grant program provides funding to state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies to support joint efforts to secure U.S. borders. For example, grantees may receive reimbursement for operational overtime costs associated with law

¹⁷Border Patrol and AMO also provide support, upon request, to state and local law enforcement agencies. For example, Border Patrol agents may respond to requests during officer safety incidents. AMO may provide aerial and maritime support upon request to state and local law enforcement agencies, such as during search and rescue missions.

¹⁸See 6 U.S.C. § 211(f)(4) (establishing and listing duties of AMO’s Air and Marine Operations Center within CBP).

¹⁹The Northern Border Coordination Center is a forward deployed extension of Border Patrol headquarters’s Intelligence Division that serves as their central information intake and coordination framework along the U.S.-Canada border. Prior to 2017, the Northern Border Coordination Center existed as CBP’s Operational Integration Center, which was established in 2011 as a centralized location for CBP, along with federal, state, local, and international partners, to gather, analyze, and disseminate operational and strategic data in the Great Lakes region of the northern border for use by frontline agents and officers.

enforcement activities and equipment purchases, such as sensors, in support of border security activities.²⁰

CBP's collaborative efforts along the northern border also include participation in various task forces with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Specifically, Border Patrol and AMO agents may be assigned as task force officers to conduct or support casework, investigations, and coordination among federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies.²¹ For example, Border Patrol and AMO agents are assigned as task force officers along the northern border on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement-led Border Enforcement Security Task Force in Washington, Michigan, and New York to identify, investigate, disrupt, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations.²² According to Border Patrol and AMO officials, task force officers help enhance partnerships, information sharing, and situational awareness along the northern border.

CBP also partners with other DHS components to support its efforts to secure the northern border between ports of entry. For example, through the Puget Sound Regional Coordinating Mechanism, CBP—including Border Patrol and AMO—and the U.S. Coast Guard coordinate daily and conduct joint operations along the maritime border between the state of

²⁰In fiscal year 2017, 16 percent or \$8.8 million of the \$55.0 million Operation Stonegarden Grant Program funding was provided to government agencies along the northern border. Border Patrol makes recommendations for the use of Operation Stonegarden Grant Program funding to DHS across its sectors' areas of responsibility based on a risk assessment methodology, which includes factors such as apprehensions, drug seizures, and border violence. State, local, and tribal government agencies in each northern Border Patrol sector received the following funding (percent of total Operation Stonegarden Grant Program funding) in fiscal year 2017: Blaine sector, \$1,092,171 (2.0 percent); Spokane sector, \$716,680 (1.3 percent); Havre sector, \$833,250 (1.5 percent); Grand Forks, \$1,163,000 (2.1 percent); Detroit sector, \$1,648,000 (3.0 percent); Buffalo sector, \$1,435,000 (2.6 percent); Swanton sector, \$1,011,899 (1.8 percent); and Houlton sector, \$900,000 (1.6 percent).

²¹According to Border Patrol and AMO officials, task force officer positions are temporary assignments for 2 to 3 years.

²²See 6 U.S.C. § 240.

CBP Collaboration with the Government of Canada

Washington and province of British Columbia.²³ CBP also works with DHS's Science and Technology Directorate to identify, develop, and evaluate technology to address capability gaps across the northern border. For example, DHS's Science and Technology Directorate, in collaboration with Swanton Border Patrol sector, deployed land surveillance technology along the northern border.²⁴

CBP also collaborates with law enforcement agencies within the government of Canada through the Cross-Border Law Enforcement Advisory Committee and Integrated Border Enforcement Team Program.²⁵

The Cross-Border Law Enforcement Advisory Committee is a national-level committee—comprised of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada Border Services Agency, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, CBP, and U.S. Coast Guard—that provides guidance to initiatives involving partnerships between United States and Canadian law enforcement agencies along the shared border.²⁶

The Integrated Border Enforcement Team Program includes the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada Border Services Agency, U.S.

²³Regional Coordinating Mechanisms were officially established in 2011 through the Maritime Operations Coordination Plan, which was signed by the Director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement/Homeland Security Investigations, the Commissioner of CBP, and the Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard. The Maritime Operations Coordination Plan directs these agencies to utilize the fusion of intelligence, planning, and operations to target the threat of transnational terrorist and criminal acts along the coastal border. The U.S. Coast Guard serves as the lead agency responsible for planning and coordinating among components.

²⁴Specifically, this land surveillance technology—Slash Camera Pole—provides coverage near the U.S.-Canada border along clear vistas (also known as “the slash”) maintained under treaty by the International Boundary Commission.

²⁵CBP also operates an Attaché Office in Canada. CBP Attachés represent all of CBP on a daily basis—from the CBP Commissioner to individual CBP programs—to advance U.S. national and border security interests, including efforts to combat terrorism, transnational organized crime, illegal migration, and economic crime.

²⁶The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are responsible for border security between Canadian ports of entry and the Canada Border Services Agency is responsible for border security at Canadian ports of entry and inland locations.

Foreign and Domestic
Terrorism
CBP Identified
Terrorism,
Contraband
Smuggling, and
Violations of U.S.
Immigration Law as
Threats along the
Northern Border
Between Ports of
Entry

Immigration and Customs Enforcement, CBP, and U.S. Coast Guard.²⁷ According to CBP, the priority of the program is to seek and identify mutual national security threats and combat illicit cross-border activity. According to CBP and government of Canada officials, program activities may include real-time tactical intelligence sharing between Canadian and U.S. law enforcement agencies and periodic meetings to coordinate operations. These officials stated that the program helps to facilitate timely information sharing in accordance with Canadian and U.S. laws and regulations. For example, through the Integrated Border Enforcement Team Charter, Border Patrol and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police may share information related to cross-border criminal activity—such as suspected or known illegal entries between ports of entry—without delay.

In 2017, DHS completed its Northern Border Threat Analysis Report.²⁸ According to that report, the large volume of legitimate travel across the northern border and the long stretches of difficult terrain between ports of entry provide potential opportunities for individuals who may pose a national security risk to enter the United States undetected. However, the report noted that encounters with individuals associated with terrorism remain infrequent. Further, according to DHS, potential terror threats are primarily from unidentified homegrown violent extremists in Canada who believe they can enter the United States legally at ports of entry without suspicion.

Each Border Patrol sector along the northern border also completes annual intelligence reports assessing the terrorism threat in its area of responsibility and identifies examples of individuals associated with terrorist organizations, including domestic terrorist organizations, which include anti-government, white supremacist, and militia groups.²⁹ In its annual national fiscal year 2018 intelligence report, Border Patrol assessed that the threat of terrorism is low along the northern border, but may include the opportunity for foreign violent extremists to exploit

²⁷The Integrated Border Enforcement Team Program was established through the Smart Border Declaration and Action Plan signed on December 21, 2001, between the United States and Canada and operates under a signed charter that governs the administration of the program.

²⁸Department of Homeland Security, *Northern Border Threat Analysis Report Public Summary* (July 2017).

²⁹Border Patrol's eight northern border sectors completed annual intelligence reports also known as intelligence estimates for illegal migration, drug and contraband smuggling, and terrorism to document threats in their respective areas of responsibility.

Contraband Smuggling

established alien smuggling routes and networks for the purposes of evading detection en route to the United States.³⁰

According to DHS's 2017 Northern Border Threat Analysis Report, the most common threat to U.S. public safety along the northern border continues to be contraband smuggling; specifically, the bidirectional flow of illicit drugs.³¹ In its fiscal year 2018 intelligence reports for its eight northern border sectors, Border Patrol also reported contraband smuggling as a significant threat along the northern border between ports of entry, including bidirectional drug smuggling. According to Border Patrol data for fiscal years 2013 through 2017, 2 percent of Border Patrol's total drug seizures occurred along the northern border. Examples of smuggling activities include criminal groups with known ties to or hired by Mexican drug trafficking organizations suspected of smuggling narcotics into Canada and smuggling bulk currency from Canada into the United States between land border ports of entry.

Border Patrol, in its intelligence reports, also identified contraband smuggling for the purpose of evading customs duties, involving products such as tobacco, prohibited fruits, and medicinal products.³² Further, according to Border Patrol, criminal organizations smuggle contraband between ports of entry because certain items such as tobacco, agricultural, and medicinal products are prohibited for import even if properly declared at a port of entry.

In 2017, AMO reported contraband smuggling across the northern border both into and out of the United States between ports of entry. In its 2017 Northern Border Non-Commercial General Aviation Threat Overview, AMO's Air and Marine Operations Center identified illicit activity along the

³⁰U.S. Border Patrol, *Fiscal Year 2018 Intelligence Assessment* (May 3, 2018).

³¹According to DHS's 2017 Northern Border Threat Analysis Report, transnational criminal organizations continually adapt their production and smuggling methods to avoid detection by U.S. and Canadian law enforcement.

³²A customs duty is a tariff or tax imposed on goods when transported across international borders.

Violations of U.S. Immigration Law

northern border using general aviation aircraft, including aircraft operating in a suspicious manner at low attitude (low-flying aircraft).³³

According to Border Patrol's annual fiscal year 2018 intelligence report, violations of U.S. immigration and travel controls, which Border Patrol refers to generally as "illegal immigration," along the northern border is a threat and is frequently bidirectional between the United States and Canada.³⁴ Additionally, our analysis of Border Patrol data from fiscal years 2013 through 2017 showed that Border Patrol agents apprehended 14,319 potentially removable aliens—foreign nationals who Border Patrol suspected or determined were removable from the United States—along the northern border or approximately 1 percent of its total nationwide apprehensions of potentially removable aliens (1.97 million aliens).³⁵ According to DHS's 2017 Northern Border Threat Analysis Report, known illegal crossings between ports of entry by individuals on the northern border conform to established migration patterns between large population centers. Further, the report states that terrain, weather, and distance are factors that constrain migrant travel between ports of entry in remote areas of the border.

According to Border Patrol officials, the majority of individuals apprehended along the northern border are suspected or known to have illegally entered the United States across the southwest border and traveled to the northern border region before being detected, while a smaller number of individuals are suspected or known to have illegally entered the United States from Canada between ports of entry. Specifically, of the potentially removable aliens apprehended by Border

³³U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations, *Air and Marine Operations Center, 2017 Northern Border Non-Commercial General Aviation Threat Overview* (Mar. 10, 2017). According to CBP, there is no set altitude to distinguish aircraft as low flyers. However, an example would be a general aviation aircraft—all forms of aviation except commercial and military—flying under 1,000 feet but with no legitimate reason, such as crop dusting or flying in the vicinity of an airport.

³⁴Border Patrol also identified irregular northbound migration as a significant activity along the northern border. For the purposes of this report, irregular northbound migration is defined as the entry into Canada of foreign nationals from the United States between official ports of entry, typically for the purposes of making an asylum claim. For additional information on irregular northbound migration from the United States to Canada between ports of entry, see appendix IV.

³⁵These arrests are also referred to as apprehensions of aliens (persons who are not U.S. citizens or nationals; i.e., foreign nationals) who may be removable on statutory grounds of inadmissibility or deportability.

Patrol along the northern border during this period, we found that 61 percent (8,727) were individuals suspected or known to have illegally entered the United States from Mexico, while 19 percent (2,782) were individuals suspected or known to have illegally entered the United States from Canada.³⁶ The Swanton Border Patrol sector apprehended the highest percentage of individuals who illegally entered the United States from Canada between ports of entry during this period, 43 percent (1,206 individuals) of the total number across all eight northern border sectors.³⁷

Border Patrol, in its fiscal year 2018 intelligence reports for its eight northern border sectors, also identified alien smuggling—bringing into, or harboring or transporting within, the United States, foreign nationals in violation of U.S. immigration law—organizations operating along the northern border between ports of entry as a threat. Examples of alien smuggling activities include alien smuggling organizations using private residences along international waterways to provide locations for staging an illegal entry.

According to Border Patrol officials, criminal organizations operating along the U.S.-Canada border frequently conduct bidirectional alien smuggling activities between the United States and Canada as agents encounter numerous types of groups being smuggled into Canada.³⁸

³⁶The remaining 20 percent of potentially removable aliens apprehended by Border Patrol were individuals who were suspected or known to have entered the United States lawfully from a country other than Canada or Mexico through an air or sea port of entry; for example, visitors to the United States who were admitted under a valid non-immigrant visa. For more information on Border Patrol's apprehensions along the northern border, see appendix II.

³⁷According to Swanton sector officials, after Canada lifted the visa requirement for citizens from certain countries (such as Mexico and Romania), Swanton sector saw a significant increase in the number of apprehensions in its area of responsibility. The officials stated that apprehensions in fiscal year 2018 (736 apprehensions) were 64 percent higher than fiscal year 2017. In addition, the officials stated that the number of illegal entries from Canada increased 232 percent (548 illegal entries) in fiscal year 2018 compared to fiscal year 2017.

³⁸According to Border Patrol officials, enforcement efforts to target these criminal organizations may be limited as U.S. law generally addresses inbound alien smuggling or harboring of aliens within the United States. Further, according to Border Patrol officials, agents are typically unable to arrest individuals for facilitating alien smuggling activities if there is no nexus to U.S. law, which hampers Border Patrol's ability to target these criminal smuggling organizations.

CBP Identified Northern Border Staffing and Resource Challenges and Actions to Address Them but Faces Competing Priorities

CBP identified staffing and resource challenges to its operations and enforcement activities across the northern border and has identified actions to address them, but faces competing priorities.³⁹ Border Patrol and AMO officials we met with identified agent staffing challenges along the northern border across all sectors and branches that limit enforcement activities, including Border Patrol agent availability to conduct patrol missions and a limited number and frequency of AMO missions due to AMO agent availability. Border Patrol and AMO officials also identified resource challenges along the northern border across all sectors and branches, including radar and surveillance technology used to surveil the air, maritime, and land environments; IT and communication technology, including network infrastructure and bandwidth that allow agents to access CBP systems and tactical communications, such as land mobile radios for agent communication during border security missions; and infrastructure and facilities, including tactical infrastructure—roads, fencing, and border markers—and facilities used by agents to secure the border.

It is unknown whether the staffing and resource challenges identified by CBP to secure the northern border between ports of entry will be addressed due to competing southwest border security priorities. CBP identified actions and ongoing efforts to address agent staffing and resource challenges to secure the northern border between ports of entry. In June 2018, DHS released a Northern Border Strategy to establish actions that are intended to, among other things, improve DHS's efforts to safeguard the northern border against various threats.⁴⁰ DHS is developing an implementation plan for its Northern Border Strategy which will, among other things, identify actions to address gaps in capabilities to secure the northern border between ports of entry. However, it is unknown whether CBP's northern border staffing and resource challenges will be addressed due to competing priorities with southwest border security. For example, instructions in Executive Order 13767 require DHS to obtain complete operational control—prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other

³⁹This section of the report omits specific information on the effects of Border Patrol and AMO staffing and resource challenges, as well as the number and names of sectors and branches that identified challenges.

⁴⁰Department of Homeland Security, *Northern Border Strategy* (June 12, 2018).

CBP Identified Staffing Challenges in Securing the Northern Border and Has Ongoing Efforts to Improve Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

contraband—of the southwest border, in part through hiring thousands of agents and constructing a physical barrier.⁴¹

Border Patrol officials identified staffing challenges across the northern border sectors that have affected enforcement activities.⁴² Officials from northern border sectors told us that an insufficient number of agents authorized or onboard at its sectors and stations limits their ability to conduct enforcement activities and may, at times, pose risks to agent safety.

In addition, Border Patrol officials from northern border sectors stated that agent availability for enforcement activities is further limited by detainee transportation and supervision duties and requests for law enforcement assistance from other agencies. For example, Border Patrol sector officials stated that detainee transportation duties result in agents being unable to conduct enforcement activities for up to 1 day and duties related to supervision of detainees during court proceedings and meetings with federal prosecutors may result in agents being unable to conduct enforcement activities for up to 1 week. Further, responding to local calls for assistance during assaults may result in agents being unable to conduct enforcement operations for multiple hours.

Also, Border Patrol officials from northern border sectors stated that vacancies in civilian Law Enforcement Communication Assistant positions affect enforcement activities. Law Enforcement Communication Assistant duties at each northern border sector are dispatching and officer safety checks, monitoring surveillance camera feeds and unattended ground sensor activation, and conducting intelligence research checks for agents on duty across all stations in the sector.

Border Patrol officials told us it is difficult to recruit and retain qualified applicants for vacant positions due to the lower General Schedule grade of the position across Border Patrol, which is not competitive with salaries for similar positions offered through state and local law enforcement

⁴¹See Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements, Exec. Order No. 13767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8793 (Jan. 30, 2017) (issued January 25).

⁴²For the purposes of this report, enforcement activities include agent work assignments such as activities that involve identifying and apprehending illegal entrants and identifying and seizing contraband. For example, linewatch duties include maintaining surveillance from a covert position to detect, prevent, or apprehend illegal entrants at or near the land border.

agencies.⁴³ In August 2018, Border Patrol officials stated that they created an additional position, the Law Enforcement Information Specialist, with additional duties and responsibilities at a higher General Schedule grade.

AMO Staffing

AMO identified staffing challenges across its northern border branches which, according to AMO officials, have affected the frequency and number of air and maritime missions. Specifically, officials at AMO branches told us that an insufficient number of agents authorized or onboard at its branches and units limits the frequency and number of air and maritime missions AMO is able to conduct along the northern border. For example, AMO officials stated that an insufficient number of Marine Interdiction Agents limits the number of daily and weekly maritime patrol missions. For air missions, AMO officials stated that an insufficient number of Air Interdiction Agents may limit the ability to fulfill immediate or previously unscheduled requests for air support.

AMO officials from northern border branches also cited agent recruitment, hiring, and retention as a challenge for filling vacant positions. For example, officials stated that AMO faces competition with commercial airline companies for recruitment and retention of qualified individuals with commercial pilot certificates, including higher salaries, as well as delays from CBP's lengthy application process.

AMO officials from northern branches also stated that agent availability for air and maritime missions is sometimes limited due to temporary duty assignments to support national missions, which can limit local operations along the northern border. AMO officials stated that these temporary duty assignments involve relocation of Air Interdiction Agents, aircraft, and maintenance staff to other operating locations for multiple weeks. For example, in 2017, Air Interdiction Agents flew missions to support recovery efforts after the hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. In 2018, Air Interdiction Agents supported security operations during the Super Bowl in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

CBP's Ongoing Efforts to Address Staffing Challenges

CBP is taking actions to address agent recruitment, hiring, and retention. We reported in June 2018 on CBP's actions to address challenges for recruitment, hiring, and retention of Border Patrol and AMO agents, such

⁴³In 2010, the Office of Personnel Management issued a decision that lowered the General Schedule grade of the position; see Office of Personnel Management Decision Number C-1802-06-01.

as increased participation in recruitment events and offering relocation opportunities for existing employees.⁴⁴ According to CBP's Fiscal Year 2019 Congressional Budget Justification, newly hired Border Patrol agents will be assigned to the southwest border to allow for the reassignment of more experienced agents to the northern border. As of August 2019, Border Patrol officials expected that all sectors in fiscal year 2019, including the northern border sectors, would receive an increase in the number of authorized agent positions.⁴⁵ Border Patrol officials also stated that as of June 2018, they were completing a Personnel Requirements Determination Initiative to analyze agent allocations across its sectors and stations to develop a staffing allocation model to optimally align staff according to workload and area of responsibility conditions.

In June 2018, we also reported that AMO had taken steps to address staffing challenges, such as implementing voluntary paid relocation opportunities and pursuing additional human capital flexibilities to address its difficulty in retaining Air Interdiction Agents, including a group retention incentive and a special salary rate.⁴⁶ AMO personnel who are non-bargaining unit employees and have served for at least 3 years in their current location are also eligible for noncompetitive paid relocations. According to AMO officials, these opportunities are posted every few months and eligible personnel can apply for transfers to a specific duty station based on the needs of the operational component. In September 2017, AMO submitted an official request for a 10 percent group retention incentive for Air Interdiction Agents staffed to the northern border, among other locations. According to the request, the incentive is intended to help AMO retain qualified pilots in these hard-to-fill locations by raising their salaries to be more competitive with commercial airlines.

⁴⁴GAO, *U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Progress and Challenges in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Law Enforcement Personnel*, [GAO-18-487](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 27, 2018).

⁴⁵According to Border Patrol officials, the northern border sectors are likely to receive a total increase of 118 agents or 3 percent (118 of 3,710 projected number of agents) of the total increase in the number of authorized agents across all sectors in fiscal year 2019. The joint explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (Pub. L. No. 116-6) states that CBP "[f]unding [for operations and support] is provided to sustain the current level of Border Patrol Agents." See H.R. Rep. No. 116-9, 475 (Feb. 13, 2019).

⁴⁶[GAO-18-487](#).

CBP Identified Resource Challenges Affecting Northern Border Security and Actions to Address Them

Border Patrol officials we met with stated that Border Patrol's Operational Mobility and Resident Agent Programs have helped northern border sectors to address agent staffing challenges. The Operational Mobility Program provides Border Patrol agents with opportunities for a paid relocation to a more desirable location at a lower cost to CBP than an official permanent change of station transfer. Border Patrol officials stated that the use of the Operational Mobility Program resulted in agents electing to relocate to northern border sectors from other duty stations. The Resident Agent Program operates in locations where Border Patrol's routine presence is extremely limited and is intended to improve situational awareness by the creation of partnerships, expansion of community outreach, and development and dissemination of intelligence. The Resident Agent location is the physical residence of an agent in a location where there is not an official Border Patrol station.⁴⁷

Officials from Border Patrol sectors and AMO branches stated that there are gaps in air radar coverage along the northern border, limiting their ability to detect and identify aircraft incursions. CBP has taken actions to address these gaps in air radar coverage. In December 2017, CBP completed an AMO-led assessment of air radar capabilities, which identified coverage gaps and needs across the United States, including at the northern border.⁴⁸ In May 2018, AMO officials stated that they began working with the Department of Defense to test technology along the northern border to address gaps in air radar coverage.⁴⁹

Officials from Border Patrol sectors and AMO branches stated that there are limited maritime radar capabilities to detect and identify vessel incursions along the northern border. CBP has taken actions to address these gaps in maritime radar capabilities.⁵⁰ Border Patrol, through its Maritime Detection Project, plans to deploy additional maritime radar technology in Detroit and Buffalo sectors to expand maritime radar

⁴⁷The Resident Agent Program operates in the northern border in Havre and Grand Forks sectors.

⁴⁸U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Capability Analysis Report for Air Domain Awareness* (Dec. 3, 2017).

⁴⁹According to DHS headquarters officials, DHS's Science and Technology Directorate is identifying, developing, and evaluating technology to address gaps in air radar coverage.

⁵⁰According to DHS headquarters officials, DHS's Science and Technology Directorate is identifying, developing, and evaluating technology to address gaps in maritime radar coverage.

coverage on Lake Erie.⁵¹ Also, in 2017, CBP participated in a 1-year DHS pilot project with the government of Canada to share radar information in an area along the northern border to detect vessel incursions. AMO, through its Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft, conducts maritime radar patrols along portions of the northern border to address gaps in maritime radar coverage on some of the Great Lakes and parts of the Pacific Northwest, to detect and identify vessel incursions.⁵²

Land Surveillance Technology

Border Patrol sector officials stated that there are challenges with land surveillance technology that is used for agents to detect, identify, and respond to illicit cross-border activity along the northern border. Further, Border Patrol headquarters and sector officials stated that there are gaps in surveillance technology coverage along the northern border to detect and identify illicit cross-border activity.⁵³ In addition, Border Patrol officials also identified challenges with Legacy Remote Video Surveillance Systems.⁵⁴ For example, officials we met with identified system outages due to delays in maintenance and replacement of parts, and poor quality video surveillance camera images.

In March 2017, CBP completed a Border Patrol-led assessment of land surveillance capabilities to assess gaps, including gaps in surveillance technology coverage across all Border Patrol sectors.⁵⁵

⁵¹According to Border Patrol officials, coverage will be expanded through deployment of two additional radar tower sites that are expected to be completed in 2019. Further, according to Border Patrol officials, a radar tower site with camera sensors on Lake Champlain and Missisquoi Bay in Swanton sector on the New York-Vermont border will be transferred in 2019 from DHS's Science and Technology Directorate to Border Patrol as part of the Maritime Detection Project.

⁵²AMO's Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft is medium-range, fixed-wing, and twin turboprop aircraft used to conduct aerial patrol and surveillance over land and water, and for enforcement relocation of personnel and equipment. See also U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Capability Analysis Report for the Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft* (Apr. 29, 2016).

⁵³Border Patrol headquarters and sector officials also stated that some land surveillance technology, such as unattended ground sensors, may not operate during adverse weather conditions, such as freezing temperatures and heavy snowfall, which limits their effectiveness at detecting illicit cross-border activity.

⁵⁴Legacy Remote Video Surveillance Systems were deployed along the northern border from 1998 to 2002.

⁵⁵U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Capability Analysis Report for U.S. Customs and Border Protection Domain Awareness: Land Surveillance* (Mar. 23, 2017).

Network Infrastructure and Bandwidth

Officials from Border Patrol sectors and AMO branches we met with identified inadequate network infrastructure—including network infrastructure and equipment nearing or past its useful life—and bandwidth that have affected enforcement activities and other required tasks along the northern border.⁵⁶ For example, Border Patrol officials stated that inadequate network infrastructure and bandwidth has delayed or prevented the processing of detainees at some stations.⁵⁷ AMO officials also stated that inadequate bandwidth limits the ability of agents to use BigPipe, a system used to coordinate operations with partner agencies during air and maritime missions. In September 2017, DHS's Office of Inspector General found that outdated IT infrastructure and equipment contributed to CBP-wide system performance and availability challenges; a considerable portion of IT equipment and infrastructure had reached its useful life; and OIT was unable to replace infrastructure past its useful life because of financial constraints.⁵⁸

CBP's Fiscal Year 2019 Congressional Budget Justification identifies actions to improve network infrastructure and bandwidth, including deploying new workstations and replacing network infrastructure components that are past their useful life to provide reliable operations and address vulnerabilities. OIT officials stated that pilot projects using

⁵⁶Border Patrol and AMO officials stated that insufficient Field Technology Officer staffing across the northern border led to delays in upgrading, installing, and repairing technology and systems, including addressing network infrastructure and bandwidth challenges. OIT officials stated that there is an insufficient number of Field Technology Officers to repair, deploy, and upgrade information, communication, and surveillance technology along the northern border. As of September 1, 2018, 13 percent (17 of 132) of authorized Field Technology Officer positions assigned to the states of Washington, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine were vacant.

⁵⁷OIT officials stated that CBP's operations along the northern border face additional challenges for obtaining sufficient bandwidth due to a limited number of commercial service providers in rural areas. Specifically, according to OIT officials, the current providers' outdated network capacity provides very low bandwidth that does not support CBP's modern network needs. OIT officials stated the cost to bring sufficient bandwidth to these CBP northern border field sites would incur massive capital spending to run fiber optic cable from the closest city. With an extremely limited number of residents near CBP northern border field sites, according to OIT officials, the local providers have no justification to invest in massive infrastructure deployment without the possibility of financial return and costs would be passed on to the government to fund.

⁵⁸Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *CBP's IT Systems and Infrastructure Did Not Fully Support Border Security Operations*, OIG-17-114 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 28, 2017).

virtual private network connections are being implemented at CBP locations to address bandwidth challenges and reduce costs.

Tactical Communications

Officials from Border Patrol sectors and AMO branches we met with identified challenges with tactical communications, including gaps in land mobile radio coverage along the northern border. Border Patrol and AMO agents responsible for securing the northern border depend on land mobile radio systems for secure, reliable, and timely exchanges of critical information to effectively carry out their mission. Border Patrol and AMO officials we met with identified lack of coverage in certain areas, which impacts agent communication during enforcement activities.

CBP has taken actions to identify coverage gaps and deploy additional equipment to improve communications coverage along the northern border. For example, CBP has deployed additional equipment to improve tactical communication coverage in Border Patrol's Houlton sector in Maine through its Tactical Communication Modernization Program from fiscal years 2009 through 2017.⁵⁹ Border Patrol officials stated that they are deploying repeater tower sites—technology used for retransmitting and extending the range of radio communications—and other technology to mitigate dead spots and gaps in coverage in three sectors. According to CBP's Fiscal Year 2019 Congressional Budget Justification, updated handheld and mobile radios are being provided to Border Patrol and AMO, including northern border locations, to improve tactical communications and interoperability with law enforcement partners.

Tactical Infrastructure

Border Patrol sector officials identified challenges due to limited tactical infrastructure, such as a lack of barriers to impede vehicle incursions and access to roads along the border that make it difficult to impede illegal entries. For example in one sector, officials stated that a lack of vehicle barriers leads to a gap in Border Patrol's ability to impede illicit vehicle incursions. In other sectors, officials stated that Border Patrol agents face challenges accessing border areas due to a lack of roads or access to maintained roads. Officials from northern border sectors also stated that agents face challenges preventing illegal entries due to a lack of barriers and a lack of signs or markers indicating the location of the international border.

⁵⁹For recent work on this topic, including the status of CBP's Tactical Communication Modernization Program, see GAO, *Homeland Security Acquisitions: Leveraging Programs' Results Could Further DHS's Progress to Improve Portfolio Management*, [GAO-18-339SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 17, 2018).

Facilities

Officials from Border Patrol sectors and AMO branches we met with noted that certain facilities do not have space to accommodate the number of assigned agents and civilian personnel along the northern border. For example, in one sector, officials stated that there is lack of space to accommodate Law Enforcement Communication Assistants to monitor surveillance technology and direct agents to respond to potential illicit activity. Border Patrol officials in other sectors also stated that certain stations in their sectors do not have adequate facilities to process and house detainees.⁶⁰ For example, one station lacks a dedicated processing and interview area and detainees are processed in an open location next to agent workstations, which may pose a safety risk to agents, according to officials.

In November 2018, Office of Facilities and Asset Management officials identified 20 new and major construction projects planned for the northern border, including replacement of Border Patrol facilities with identified challenges; however, these projects have been deferred due to lack of funding. Further, according to Office of Facilities and Asset Management officials, CBP has insufficient funds to address deferred maintenance projects and a limited number of maintenance staff to repair facilities.

Vehicles and Usage Reporting
Technology

Officials from Border Patrol sectors we met with identified aging vehicles that are beyond their expected service life, which affect enforcement activities along the northern border.⁶¹ According to Border Patrol officials, funding is not available to replace aging vehicles across all sectors, but funds are allocated annually to replace a percentage of vehicles in the northern border sectors that are beyond their expected service life. Further, Border Patrol officials stated that the harsh climate along the northern border creates additional burdens on agent vehicles prior to those vehicles reaching the end of their expected service life. Officials from Border Patrol sectors we met with identified agent vehicles that lack the technology needed to complete monthly motor vehicle utilization reports required by the DHS Stop Asset and Vehicle Excess Act.⁶² In

⁶⁰Border Patrol officials we met with also identified deficiencies in the condition of facilities, including inadequate parking, lack of fire sprinkler systems, leaks in roofing, and electrical safety issues.

⁶¹Border Patrol's replacement criteria for agent vehicles, such as sport utility vehicles and trucks, beyond their expected service life are 6 years or 75,000 miles.

⁶²Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-296, tit. VII, § 701, 116 Stat. 2135, 2218-19, as amended by Pub. L. No. 115-38, 131 Stat. 855 (2017) (classified, as amended, at 6 U.S.C. § 341).

DHS Is Developing an Implementation Plan for Its Northern Border Strategy but Faces Competing Priorities with the Southwest Border

August 2018, Border Patrol officials stated that CBP was in the process of awarding a contract for installation of vehicle reporting technology in agent vehicles, including across the northern border sectors.

In addition to the actions identified above by CBP to address northern border staffing and resource challenges, DHS is developing an implementation plan for its Northern Border Strategy, which includes a goal to enhance border security operations.⁶³ The strategy states that the implementation plan is intended to outline roles, responsibilities, programs, and timelines for accomplishing the strategy's goals and objectives for fiscal years 2020 to 2024. According to DHS officials, the department plans to use the strategy and corresponding implementation plan to prioritize departmental resources and achieve the specified outcomes over the 5-year period. According to DHS officials, the implementation plan is expected to be completed in 2019 and will identify actions to address gaps in capabilities to secure the northern border between ports of entry; for example, gaps in domain awareness and associated technology, among other things.

It is unknown whether the staffing and resource challenges identified by CBP to secure the northern border between ports of entry will be addressed due to competing southwest border security priorities. According to Border Patrol and AMO headquarters officials, resources are allocated across their operating areas based on threats and volume of illicit activity, which are greatest on the southwest border. Further, Border Patrol and AMO headquarters officials stated that resource allocation is prioritized to the southwest border to also meet instructions in Executive Order 13767 to obtain complete operational control—prevention of all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful (i.e. inadmissible) aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband—of the southwest border.⁶⁴ While DHS is implementing its Northern Border Strategy, including developing an implementation plan, addressing CBP's northern border staffing and resource challenge will compete with its other enforcement priorities along the southwest border.

⁶³Department of Homeland Security, *Northern Border Strategy* (June 12, 2018).

⁶⁴See Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements, Exec. Order No. 13767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8793 (Jan. 30, 2017) (issued January 25).

CBP Has Not Developed Performance Measures to Assess Its Effectiveness at Securing the Northern Border Between Ports of Entry

While CBP has performance measures (strategic and management) that assess certain border security operations or programs, some of which include data from the northern border, it does not have specific measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry.⁶⁵

More specifically, Border Patrol has two strategic measures that include data from the northern border, but these measures do not assess Border Patrol's effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. The two measures—the percent of recurring border surveillance implemented in remote, low-risk areas between ports of entry and the percent of time Border Patrol meets its goal of responding to potential illegal activity in remote, low-risk areas—are based on information from CBP's National Border Geospatial Intelligence Strategy. The measures assess Border Patrol's use of reports developed using geospatial intelligence technology of potential illicit cross-border activity.⁶⁶ However, this technology is not applied in maritime environments, so the measures do not include data from two northern border sectors. Further, Border Patrol's two strategic measures combine data from the southwest and northern borders.

Border Patrol has four management measures that also contain data from the northern border. These measures are (1) the number of joint operations conducted along the northern border by Border Patrol agents and Canadian law enforcement; (2) the percent of apprehensions at Border Patrol checkpoints; (3) the percent of Border Patrol agents who are trained and certified to perform enforcement actions; and (4) the percent of Border Patrol equipment assessed as ready to support law enforcement operations.

Border Patrol's four management measures include data from the northern border, but do not assess Border Patrol's effectiveness at

⁶⁵Performance measures include strategic and management measures and their associated targets or goals identified by DHS and CBP. Strategic measures communicate results delivered for agency goals by mission programs and are considered GPRAMA measures. Strategic measures are reported in the DHS Annual Performance Report. Management measures highlight mission program performance expectations related to budgetary plans and are reported in CBP's annual congressional budget justification.

⁶⁶Specifically, the reports are produced using change detection technology and used to notify Border Patrol of any potential illicit activity in areas designated by Border Patrol as remote and low-risk along both the northern and southwest borders.

securing the northern border between ports of entry. Although one management measure tracks the number of joint operations conducted along the northern border by Border Patrol agents and Canadian law enforcement personnel, that measure does not assess Border Patrol's performance in conducting those joint operations or their effectiveness. Border Patrol's three additional management measures include data from the northern border combined with other areas, such as the southwest border, and therefore are not specific to the northern border.

AMO's one strategic and one management measure include data from the northern border, but do not assess AMO's effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry in the air and maritime environments. For the strategic measure, AMO reports the percent of detected conventional aircraft incursions resolved. The measure represents the percent of conventional aircraft detected visually or by sensor technology, suspected of illicit cross-border activity, which are brought to a successful resolution by its Air and Marine Operations Center.⁶⁷ For the management measure, AMO reports air mission launch rate, which is the percent of all requests made for aircraft to which AMO was able to respond. These two measures include data across all border areas, including the northern border, but are not specific to the northern border.

Border Patrol officials stated that they have not developed or implemented performance measures to assess their effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry because of competing priorities related to developing measures for southwest border security. According to Border Patrol officials responsible for developing and implementing performance measures, Border Patrol's priority is to develop measures to assess the effectiveness of its efforts to secure the southwest border, such as the effort to achieve complete operational control as outlined in the Executive Order 13767 instructions and the

⁶⁷Resolution of an aircraft incursion occurs when (1) law enforcement action has been taken for criminal violations; (2) appropriate regulatory or administrative action has been taken for non-criminal violations; or (3) the aircraft did not land or otherwise display unlawful conduct while in the United States, was continuously visually or electronically monitored while over the United States, and has exited U.S. airspace and is no longer a threat to national security.

fiscal year 2018 DHS agency priority goal.⁶⁸ Specifically, Border Patrol is required to implement a measure to assess operational control for all southwest border sectors by the end of fiscal year 2019. Border Patrol defines operational control as its ability to impede or deny illegal border crossings, maintain situational awareness, and apply appropriate, time-bound law enforcement response and resolution between the ports of entry.

According to Border Patrol officials, the ongoing efforts to develop measures for the southwest border will eventually be applied to the northern border, but it is unknown how these ongoing efforts will be implemented to assess Border Patrol's performance at securing the northern border between ports of entry. Border Patrol officials stated that following the implementation of operational control for the southwest border, Border Patrol plans to implement the operational control measure along the northern border in fiscal year 2020. Border Patrol officials stated that they are in the early stages of this process, and could not provide any information on how operational control will be implemented for its operations along the northern border. Further, Border Patrol officials could not provide information on how operational control will be used to assess Border Patrol's performance for securing the northern border between ports of entry.

Additionally, in 2012 we recommended that Border Patrol establish milestones and time frames for developing performance measures to support implementation of its 2012-2016 Strategic Plan, including assessing progress made in securing the northern border between ports of entry and informing resource identification and allocation efforts.⁶⁹ DHS concurred with our recommendations, and Border Patrol made progress in developing new performance measures for border security. However, we closed the recommendations as not implemented in September 2017

⁶⁸See Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements, Exec. Order No. 13767, 82 Fed. Reg. 8793 (Jan.30, 2017) (issued January 25). Consistent with GPRAMA, the purpose of agency priority goals is to focus leadership priorities, set outcomes, and measure results. The goals reflect the agency's highest priorities and have targets that can be achieved within 2 years. In fiscal year 2018, DHS added an agency priority goal to enhance southern border security by implementing the operational control framework between ports of entry in all southwest Border Patrol sectors by the end of fiscal year 2019.

⁶⁹See GAO, *Border Patrol: Key Elements of a New Strategic Plan Not Yet in Place to Inform Border Security Status and Resources Needs*, [GAO-13-25](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 10, 2012).

because the measures identified did not apply to the entire northern or coastal borders, as well as the remaining uncertainty about when Border Patrol would develop a new strategic plan.

AMO officials stated that they have not implemented performance measures to assess AMO's effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry in the air and maritime environments because of difficulties in creating region-specific performance targets. Specifically, AMO officials stated that it is difficult to set performance targets for a specific region, such as the northern border, because the threat environment is constantly changing. Also, the officials stated that AMO is waiting for completion of the Northern Border Strategy implementation plan before developing any performance measures specific to the northern border. Additionally, Border Patrol and AMO have ongoing efforts to develop border security metrics pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017.⁷⁰ The act directs DHS to annually report metrics and associated data and methodology, including metrics for border security between ports of entry.⁷¹

Consistent with GPRAMA, agencies should establish a balanced set of performance measures, which reinforces the need for agencies to have a variety of measures across program areas.⁷² Furthermore, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* state that management should determine whether performance measures for the defined objectives are appropriate for evaluating the entity's performance using targets and milestones.⁷³ The standards also state that management should track entity achievements and compare actual performance to planned or expected results using established activities such as comparisons and assessments.

⁷⁰See Pub. L. No. 114-328, div. A, tit. X, § 1092, 130 Stat. 2000, 2429-36 (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 223). The Act includes a provision for us to review DHS's use of border security metrics included in the report.

⁷¹Department of Homeland Security, *Border Security Metrics Report* (Washington, D.C.: May 1, 2018). In its first report, DHS noted that some metrics are still under development and have not been applied to the northern border.

⁷²See generally Pub. L. No. 111-352, 124 Stat. 3866 (2011) (updating GPRA).

⁷³GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

Border Patrol and AMO could leverage and use their ongoing efforts to develop and implement performance measures to assess effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. For example, Border Patrol and AMO could use the metrics developed in accordance with the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act to help inform the development of northern border performance measures. Developing and implementing such measures could help Border Patrol and AMO better assess the effectiveness of their northern border operations between ports of entry, including challenges due to limited staffing and resources, and take corrective actions, as necessary.

Conclusions

The United States and Canada share the longest common non-militarized border between two countries, spanning nearly 4,000 miles; however, CBP has historically focused attention and resources, including resources to develop and implement performance measures, primarily on the nearly 2,000 mile U.S.-Mexico border. While Border Patrol and AMO have performance measures that assess specific border security operations or programs that include data from the northern border, these measures generally combine data with other border regions and collectively the measures do not assess effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. Without northern border performance measures, Border Patrol and AMO cannot assess their effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. Developing and implementing northern border performance measures could help Border Patrol and AMO assess its northern border operations and address identified challenges.

Recommendations

We are making two recommendations, one to Border Patrol and one to AMO.

The Chief of Border Patrol should develop and implement performance measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry (Recommendation 1).

The Executive Assistant Commissioner of AMO should develop and implement performance measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry in the air and maritime environments (Recommendation 2).

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DHS for review and comment. DHS provided written comments, which are reproduced in full in appendix V, and technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

DHS concurred with both recommendations in the report and described actions Border Patrol and AMO plan to take in response. Border Patrol plans to develop and apply a measure of operational control to its northern border sectors; however, to meet the intent of our recommendation, Border Patrol will also need to use its measure of operational control to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. AMO plans to develop a performance measure to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry and seek DHS approval through completion of a Performance Measure Definition Form. These actions, if effectively implemented by AMO, should address the intent of the recommendation.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and the Acting Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>. If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VI.

Rebecca Gambler



Director
Homeland Security and Justice

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report addresses the following questions:

1. What threats has U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) identified along the U.S.-Canada (northern) border between ports of entry?¹
2. What challenges, if any, has CBP identified in its staffing and resources to secure the northern border between ports of entry, and what actions, if any, has CBP taken to address those challenges?
3. To what extent has CBP developed and implemented performance measures to assess the effectiveness of securing the northern border between ports of entry?

To address all three questions, we interviewed Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and CBP officials from headquarters and field locations. Specifically, we met with headquarters officials from DHS's Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans; Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation; Science and Technology Directorate; U.S. Coast Guard; and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. From CBP, we met with headquarters officials from the Air and Marine Operations (AMO), U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol), Office of Information and Technology, Office of Intelligence, Office of Facilities and Asset Management, and Office of Accountability/Performance Management and Analysis Division. We also met with officials from the government of Canada to discuss their views on northern border security. For a list of government agencies and entities interviewed in field locations, see table 1.² In addition, we conducted site visits in Michigan, New York, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington, as well as the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec. We chose these locations based on deployment of CBP resources—surveillance technology such as Remote Video Surveillance Systems—and reported levels of illicit cross-border activity by Border Patrol, including arrests of individuals and seizures of narcotics. Findings from our site visits cannot be generalized to all CBP

¹For the purposes of our report, the northern border is defined as the U.S.-Canada border from the states of Maine to Washington excluding the U.S.-Canada border in the state of Alaska.

²We interviewed Border Patrol officials from all eight sectors with areas of responsibility along the northern border: Blaine, Spokane, Havre, Grand Forks, Detroit, Buffalo, Swanton, and Houlton. We also interviewed AMO officials from all three branches responsible for its northern border operations: Bellingham Air and Marine Branch, Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch, and Manassas Air Branch.

locations along the northern border, but provide valuable insights into our research questions.

Table 1: List of Field Government Agencies/Entities Interviewed

Government agency/entity	Field component	Location
U.S. Customs and Border Protection/Air and Marine Operations	Bellingham Air and Marine Branch	Bellingham, Washington
	Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch	Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan
	Manassas Air Branch	Manassas, Virginia
	Plattsburgh Air Unit	Plattsburgh, New York
	Buffalo Air and Marine Unit	Niagara Falls, New York
	Air and Marine Operations Center	Riverside, California
U.S. Customs and Border Protection/U.S. Border Patrol	Blaine U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Blaine, Washington
	Spokane U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Spokane, Washington
	Havre U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Havre, Montana
	Grand Forks U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Grand Forks, North Dakota
	Detroit U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan
	Buffalo U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Grand Island, New York
	Swanton U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Swanton, Vermont
	Houlton U.S. Border Patrol Sector	Hodgdon, Maine
	Northern Border Coordination Center	Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan
	Marysville U.S. Border Patrol Station	Marysville, Michigan
	Newport U.S. Border Patrol Station	Derby, Vermont
	Richford U.S. Border Patrol Station	Richford, Vermont
	Swanton U.S. Border Patrol Station	Highgate Center, Vermont
	Massena U.S. Border Patrol Station	Massena, New York
	Champlain U.S. Border Patrol Station	Champlain, New York

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Government agency/entity	Field component	Location
	Niagara Falls U.S. Border Patrol Station	Niagara Falls, New York
	Buffalo U.S. Border Patrol Station	Tonawanda, New York
U.S. Customs and Border Protection/Office of Intelligence	Pacific Northwest Field Intelligence Group	Bellingham, Washington
	Great Lakes Field Intelligence Group	Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan
U.S. Coast Guard	First District	Boston, Massachusetts
	Ninth District	Cleveland, Ohio
	Thirteenth District	Seattle, Washington
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement/Homeland Security Investigations/Border Enforcement Security Task Forces	Blaine Border Enforcement Security Task Force	Blaine, Washington
	Detroit Border Enforcement Security Task Force	Detroit, Michigan
	Buffalo Border Enforcement Security Task Force	Buffalo, New York
	Massena Border Enforcement Security Task Force	Roosevelt, New York
Government of Canada	Royal Canadian Mounted Police Surrey Detachment	Surrey, British Columbia
	Royal Canadian Mounted Police Windsor Detachment	Windsor, Ontario
	Royal Canadian Mounted Police Champlain Detachment	Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec
	Canada Border Services Agency Pacific Region	Vancouver, British Columbia
	Canada Border Services Agency Southern Ontario Region	Windsor, Ontario
	Canada Border Services Agency Montreal Region	Montreal, Quebec
	Great Lakes Maritime Security Operations Centre	Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario
	Embassy of Canada	Washington, D.C.

Source: GAO. | GAO-19-470

To address the first question, we reviewed DHS and CBP policies, procedures, reports, and assessments describing threats along the northern border between ports of entry. Specifically, we reviewed DHS's

2017 Northern Border Threat Analysis Report³ and the June 2018 Northern Border Strategy.⁴ We reviewed Border Patrol policies and procedures related to identifying and documenting threats and intelligence reports, referred to as Intelligence Estimates, completed in each northern border sector for fiscal years 2017 and 2018.⁵ In addition, we reviewed Border Patrol's national intelligence estimates for fiscal years 2017 and 2018.⁶ We also reviewed documents describing the results of Border Patrol's Threats, Targets, and Operations Assessments and Intelligence Preparation for the Operation Environment process completed for northern border sectors from 2014 through 2017.

To analyze the number apprehensions and drug seizures along the northern border, we obtained data from the Enforcement Integrated Database for fiscal years 2013 through 2017, a time period for which complete data were available at the time of our review.⁷ We assessed the reliability of apprehension and seizure data by performing electronic testing for obvious errors in accuracy and completeness, reviewing existing information about the data and the systems that produced them, and interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about the data. As a result of our data reliability assessment, we determined that Border Patrol's apprehension and seizure data were sufficiently reliable for our intended use. From AMO, we reviewed the 2017 Northern Border Non-Commercial General Aviation Threat Overview and information collected by the Air and Marine Operations Center on vessel and aircraft border

³Department of Homeland Security, *Northern Border Threat Analysis Report Public Summary* (July 2017).

⁴Department of Homeland Security, *Northern Border Strategy* (June 12, 2018).

⁵See U.S. Border Patrol, *Memorandum for All Chief Patrol Agents and Directorate Chiefs, Intelligence Estimates and Intelligence Assessments*, (Nov. 28, 2016) and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Intelligence Community Directive 203: Analytic Standards* (Jan. 2, 2015).

⁶U.S. Border Patrol, *2017 National Intelligence Estimate, Fiscal Year 2018 Intelligence Assessment*.

⁷The Enforcement Integrated Database is a DHS-shared common database repository for several DHS law enforcement and homeland security applications. Data on apprehensions and seizures are held in the Enforcement Integrated Database. We received the data from Border Patrol on November 30, 2017.

incursions detected along the northern border from fiscal years 2013 through 2017.⁸

To address the second question, we reviewed CBP's Fiscal Year 2019 Congressional Budget Justification. We also reviewed the results from Border Patrol's capability gap assessment process for all eight northern border sectors completed for fiscal year 2017 and associated operational plans completed in September 2018; Border Patrol's Surveillance Capability Assessment completed in April 2017; and AMO's capability gap assessment completed in fiscal year 2016. We reviewed CBP capability analysis reports which included requirements along the northern border.⁹ In addition, we reviewed our relevant past work and DHS Office of Inspector General reports on northern border security.¹⁰

To determine the staffing and resource challenges across all eight northern border sectors and three AMO branches, we also met with officials at each sector and branch and reviewed supporting documentation. Specifically, we analyzed responses provided by officials in all eight northern border sectors and three AMO branches and supporting documentation to determine challenges mentioned by officials at two or more locations. We also reviewed supporting documentation, including inventories of assets such as vehicles, vessels, aircraft, radar and land surveillance technology, tactical communication equipment, and facilities information. We obtained Border Patrol, AMO, and Office of Information and Technology staffing information as of September 1, 2018, the most recent data available at the time of our review, including the

⁸U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations, *Air and Marine Operations Center, 2017 Northern Border Non-Commercial General Aviation Threat Overview* (Mar. 10, 2017).

⁹U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Capability Analysis Report for Vertical Lift* (Dec. 20, 2017); *Capability Analysis Report for the Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft* (Apr. 29, 2016); *Capability Analysis Report for Air Domain Awareness* (Dec. 3, 2017); and *Capability Analysis Report for U.S. Customs and Border Protection Domain Awareness: Land Surveillance* (Mar. 23, 2017).

¹⁰See for example, GAO, *Border Security: Security Vulnerabilities at Unmanned and Unmonitored U.S. Border Locations*, [GAO-07-884T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 27, 2007); *Border Security: DHS Progress and Challenges in Securing the U.S. Southwest and Northern Borders*, [GAO-11-508T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 30, 2011); *Border Security: Enhanced DHS Oversight and Assessment of Interagency Coordination Is Needed for the Northern Border*, [GAO-11-97](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 17, 2010); and Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *CBP's IT Systems and Infrastructure Did Not Fully Support Border Security Operations*, OIG-17-114 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 28, 2017).

number of authorized, onboard, and vacant positions. To assess the reliability of this staffing information, we examined the information for any anomalies and interviewed agency officials knowledgeable about the data. We found the staffing information data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of reporting the number of authorized, onboard, and vacant positions.

To address the third question, we reviewed and analyzed documentation that describes DHS and CBP processes for developing and implementing performance measures, including DHS's Annual Performance Report for Fiscal Years 2017-2019, CBP's Fiscal Year 2019 Congressional Budget Justification, and Performance Measure Definition Forms for recently developed performance measures.¹¹ We reviewed reports, assessments, and strategies that describe current DHS and CBP performance measure initiatives. We also reviewed information from CBP's National Border Geospatial Intelligence Strategy, including information on reports derived from geospatial intelligence technology, used as the basis for two of Border Patrol's performance measures that contain data from the northern border. Additionally, we reviewed DHS's most recent border security metrics report.¹² We compared CBP's actions to develop and implement performance measures to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* and the principles outlined in Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Modernization Act of 2010.¹³

We compiled the descriptive information in the northern Border Patrol sector profiles in appendix II from a variety of sources. We obtained information on each sector's geography and area of responsibility from Border Patrol documentation. We obtained information on the number of

¹¹Performance measures include strategic and management measures and their associated targets or goals identified by DHS and CBP. According to CBP, strategic measures communicate results delivered for agency goals by mission programs and are considered GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) measures. According to CBP, management measures highlight mission program performance expectations related to budgetary plans.

¹²Department of Homeland Security, *Border Security Metrics Report* (Washington, D.C.: May 1, 2018).

¹³GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014). See generally Pub. L. No. 103-62, 107 Stat. 285 (1993) and Pub. L. No. 111-352, 124 Stat. 3866 (2011) (updating GPRA). In 1993, GPRA was enacted to focus federal agencies on performance by requiring agencies to develop long-term and annual goals, and measure and report on process toward those goals annually.

authorized agents from Border Patrol as of September 1, 2018. We obtained information on the major urban areas within each sector and population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau and the data are current as of July 1, 2017, the most recent estimates available at the time of our review. Finally, we obtained geographic information on the location of each northern Border Patrol sector and its stations from Border Patrol and located the data geographically using MapInfo.

To analyze the number of apprehensions and drug seizures for each northern Border Patrol sector, we obtained data from the Enforcement Integrated Database for fiscal years 2013 through 2017, a time period for which complete data were available at the time of our review.¹⁴ The data fields we obtained included the individual's immigration status at entry and country of citizenship and the drug type and quantity in pounds seized. Our analysis categorizes the sector's apprehensions by the top four to six countries of citizenship of the individuals apprehended by Border Patrol and their immigration status at entry. Present without admission from Canada indicates the individual was suspected to be inadmissible for illegally entering the United States from Canada; present without admission from Mexico indicates the individual was suspected to be inadmissible for illegally entering the United States from Mexico; and the other category is a combination of all remaining categories, such as lawful permanent residents or other foreign nationals who may or may not be lawfully present in the United States. Our analysis also categorizes the sector's number of drug seizures by the top three to six types of drugs that Border Patrol seized most frequently, as well as the quantity in pounds of those seizures.

We assessed the reliability of apprehension and seizure data by performing electronic testing for obvious errors in accuracy and completeness, reviewing existing information about the data and the systems that produced them, and interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about the data. As a result of our data reliability assessment, we determined that Border Patrol's apprehension and seizure data were sufficiently reliable for our intended use.

We compiled the descriptive information in the northern region AMO branch profiles in appendix III from information provided by each branch and AMO headquarters. We obtained information on staffing for the three

¹⁴We received the data from Border Patrol on November 30, 2017.

northern border branches as of September 2018. We obtained the geographic information on location of each northern region AMO branch and unit from AMO and located the data geographically using MapInfo.

For total flight and float hours across all AMO operating locations and regions, we reviewed CBP data on flight and float hours from fiscal years 2013 through 2017, a time period for which complete data were available at the time of our review. For Border Patrol riverine float hours across all locations, we reviewed and analyzed float hour data from fiscal year 2017, the most recent year for which complete data were available at the time of our review. For data on air and marine missions across AMO's northern region branches and units, we reviewed CBP data on seizures of narcotics, apprehensions, and arrests from fiscal years 2013 through 2017, a time period for which complete data were available at the time of our review.¹⁵ To determine the reliability of CBP's data on flight and float hours, and mission information for seizures of narcotics, apprehensions, and arrests data, we examined the data for any anomalies, reviewed CBP guidance and documents for data collection and entry, and interviewed CBP officials to understand their methods for collecting, reporting, and validating the data. We found these data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of reporting summary data across fiscal years 2013 through 2017.

To obtain information on irregular northbound migration in appendix IV, we met with DHS and Border Patrol officials—including the three sectors (Blaine, Grand Forks, and Swanton sectors) with the highest reported levels of irregular northbound migration at the time of our review—and reviewed intelligence reports and assessments.¹⁶ We obtained the descriptive information in appendix IV on irregular northbound migration from a variety of sources.

¹⁵Data provided by CBP were from the Tasking, Operations, and Management Information System and are current as of November 24, 2017 for air and marine missions and seizures of narcotics, arrests, and apprehensions and August 8, 2018, for Border Patrol riverine operations.

¹⁶For the purposes of our report, irregular northbound migration refers to the northbound movement of foreign nationals from the United States across the northern border into Canada between official ports of entry typically to make an asylum claim.

- For data from the government of Canada on the number of asylum claimants, we downloaded publicly reported summary data on asylum claimants from the government of Canada for 2012 through 2017.¹⁷
- For data on the number of individuals illegally entering Canada between ports of entry known to Border Patrol, we collected and reviewed information from Blaine, Grand Forks, and Swanton sectors for calendar years 2012 through 2017. To determine the reliability of data, we interviewed officials at each sector to understand their methods for collecting, reporting, and validating the data. According to Border Patrol officials at Blaine, Grand Forks, and Swanton sectors, the number of individuals illegally entering Canada between ports of entry was tracked through agent reporting and detection by land surveillance technology, such as surveillance cameras and unattended ground sensors. Based on Border Patrol's methods for collecting, reporting, and validating the data, we found these data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes of reporting summary-level data.

The performance audit upon which this report is based was conducted from October 2017 to March 2019 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.¹⁸ Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We subsequently worked with DHS from March 2019 to June 2019 to prepare this nonsensitive version of the original sensitive report for public release.

¹⁷For data from 2012 through 2017, see http://www.cic.gc.ca/opendata-donneesouvertes/data/IRCC_M_AC_0001_E.xls (downloaded on June 6, 2018). For data on 2017 interceptions, see <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/asylum-claims/asylum-claims-2017.html> (downloaded on August 23, 2018).

¹⁸GAO, *Northern Border Security: CBP Identified Resource Challenges but Needs Performance Measures to Assess Security Between Ports of Entry*, GAO-19-194SU (Washington, D.C.: March 28, 2019).

Appendix II: U.S. Border Patrol Northern Border Sector Profiles

To provide a descriptive overview of the northern border sectors, we developed a profile for each of the eight U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) sectors located along the U.S.-Canada (northern) border: Blaine, Washington; Spokane, Washington; Havre, Montana; Grand Forks, North Dakota; Detroit, Michigan; Buffalo, New York; Swanton, Vermont; and Houlton, Maine. These profiles are listed in order from the western-most sector to the eastern-most sector and contain an overview of each sector's geography and area of responsibility and an analysis of apprehensions and drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017.¹

Methodology for Developing Sector Profiles

We compiled the descriptive information in the following sector profiles from a variety of sources. We obtained information on each sector's geography and area of responsibility from Border Patrol documentation. We obtained information on the number of authorized agents from Border Patrol and the data are current as of September 2018. We obtained information on the major urban areas within each sector and population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau and the data are current as of July 1, 2017. Finally, we obtained geographic information on the location of each northern Border Patrol sector and its stations from Border Patrol and located the data geographically using MapInfo.

To analyze the number of apprehensions and drug seizures, we obtained data from the Enforcement Integrated Database for fiscal years 2013 through 2017.² Our analysis categorizes the sector's apprehensions by the top four to six countries of citizenship of the individuals apprehended by Border Patrol and their status at entry. Present without admission from Canada indicates the individual was suspected to be inadmissible for illegally entering the United States from Canada; present without

¹Under 6 U.S.C. § 211(e), Border Patrol is the CBP office with primary responsibility for interdicting persons attempting to illegally enter or exit the United States or goods being illegally imported into or exported from the United States between ports of entry. To that end, Border Patrol agents are statutorily authorized to enforce U.S. immigration, customs and criminal (including drug-related) laws along U.S. borders. Border Patrol reports the number of apprehensions and seizures by sector every fiscal year. Apprehensions refer to arrests of aliens (persons who are not U.S. citizens or nationals; i.e., foreign nationals) who are potentially removable on statutory grounds of inadmissibility or deportability—referred to as potentially removable aliens. Border Patrol agents may also encounter and, as appropriate, arrest U.S. citizens or non-removable aliens for violating U.S. law, such as smuggling contraband.

²The Enforcement Integrated Database is a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) common database repository for several DHS law enforcement and homeland security applications. Data on apprehensions and seizures are held in the Enforcement Integrated Database. We received the data from Border Patrol on November 30, 2017.

admission from Mexico indicates the individual was suspected to be inadmissible for illegally entering the United States from Mexico; and the other category is a combination of all remaining categories such as lawful permanent residents or other foreign nationals who may or may not be lawfully present in the United States. Our analysis also categorizes the sector's number of drug seizures by the top three to six types of drugs that Border Patrol seized most frequently, as well as the quantity in pounds of those seizures.³ For additional information on our scope and methodology, see appendix I.

³We rounded the quantity of drugs seized to the nearest pound.

Blaine, Washington

Sector profile

U.S. Border Patrol Blaine Sector's geography includes mountainous and heavily forested areas, pastures, and farmland. The sector's maritime domain includes the Puget Sound and the San Juan Islands, an archipelago of over 400 islands, and comprises much of the Salish Sea—a network of waterways between the state of Washington and British Columbia. The maritime border consists of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the Haro Strait, and the Strait of Georgia. Urban areas in the sector include Seattle, Washington (population 725,000) and Bellingham, Washington (population 89,000).

Table 2: U.S. Border Patrol Blaine Sector's Area of Responsibility

Area of responsibility	Alaska, Oregon, Western Washington
Border miles	252 miles, 89 miles of land border and 163 miles of maritime border ^a
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	317 authorized
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Bellingham, Blaine, Port Angeles, Sumas
Air and Marine Operations support	Bellingham Air and Marine Branch - Bellingham and Port Angeles Marine Units

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

^aThis does not include Alaska's 1,538 land border miles.

Figure 4: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Blaine Sector's Area of Responsibility



The border between the United States and Canada, Peace Arch Park, Blaine, Washington.

Source: GAO. | GAO-19-470

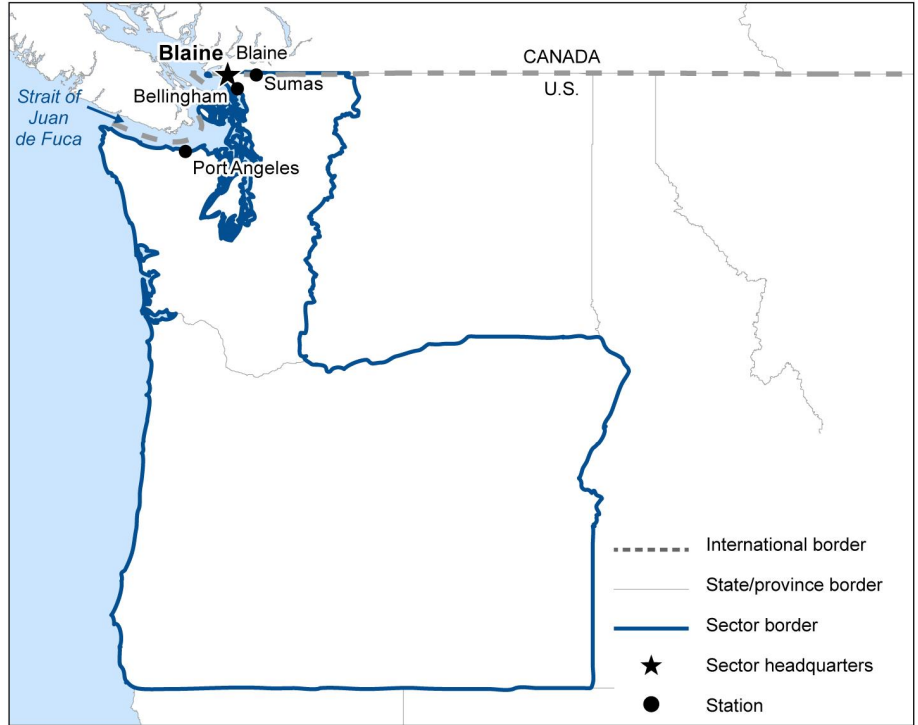


Peace Arch Port of Entry, Blaine, Washington.

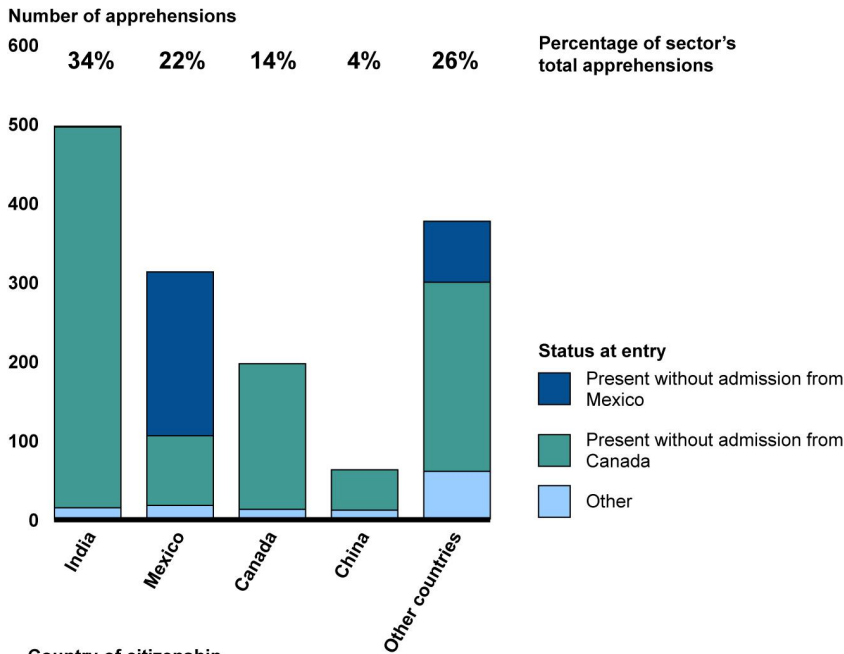
Figure 5: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Blaine Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

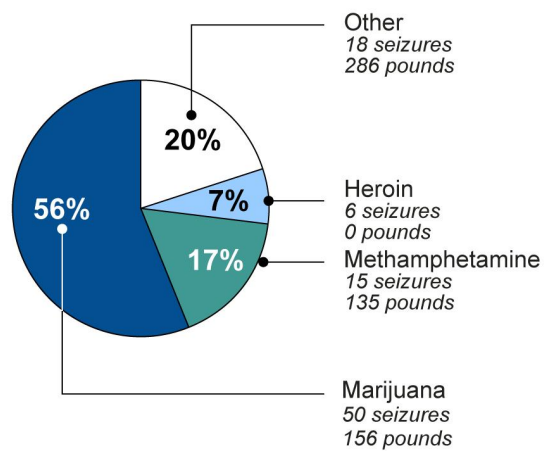
The map depicts Blaine sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 1,442 apprehensions in Blaine sector accounted for approximately 10 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Indian citizens (34 percent) and Mexican citizens (22 percent). Blaine sector apprehended 1,043 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 285 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Blaine sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Blaine sector accounted for approximately 5 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of marijuana (56 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Country of citizenship

Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada.

Spokane, Washington

Sector profile

The U.S. Border Patrol Spokane Sector’s geography is rugged and mountainous terrain, including densely forested mountainous areas, wilderness areas, a river valley, and sparsely forested rangeland. The sector also includes two cross-border lakes, Osoyoos and Kooconusa, and five cross-border rivers, the Similkameen, Kettle, Columbia, Okanogan, and Kootenai Rivers. The area along the border of Spokane sector’s area of responsibility is remote and sparsely populated. Urban areas in the sector include Spokane, Washington (population 217,000).

Table 3: U.S. Border Patrol Spokane Sector’s Area of Responsibility

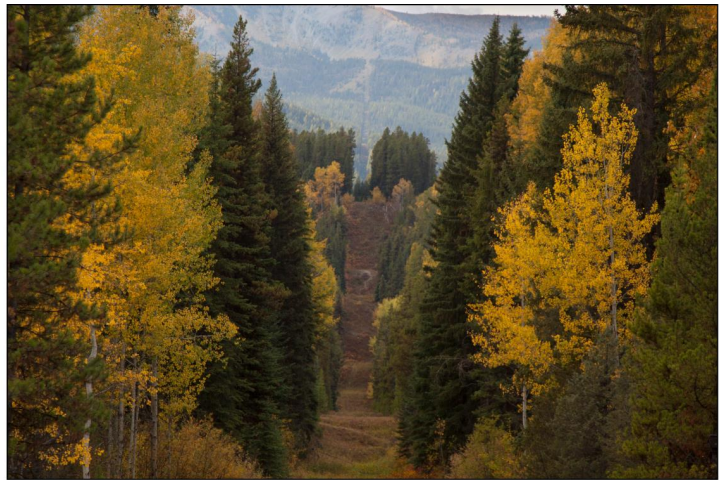
Area of responsibility	Eastern Washington, Idaho, Western Montana
Border miles	308 miles, 305 miles of land border and 3 miles of maritime border
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	290 authorized
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Bonnors Ferry, Colville, Curlew, Eureka, Metaline Falls, Oroville, Whitefish
Air and Marine Operations support	Bellingham Air and Marine Branch – Spokane Air Unit

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

Figure 6: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Spokane Sector’s Area of Responsibility



Border Patrol agent patrolling on an all-terrain vehicle.



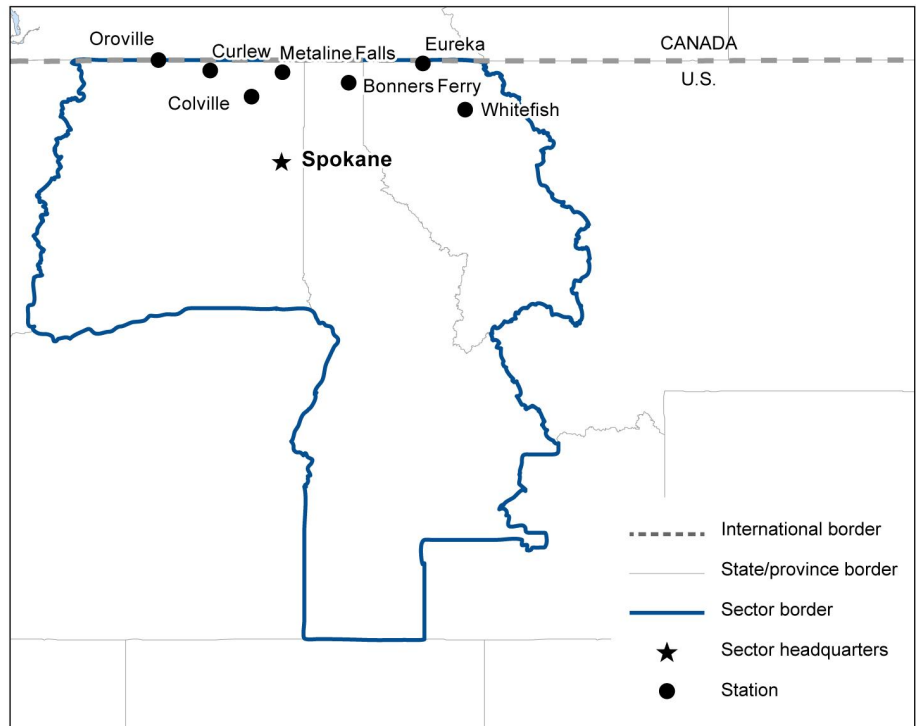
View of the “slash”, the clear cut of vegetation or vista along the U.S.-Canada border.

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection. | GAO-19-470

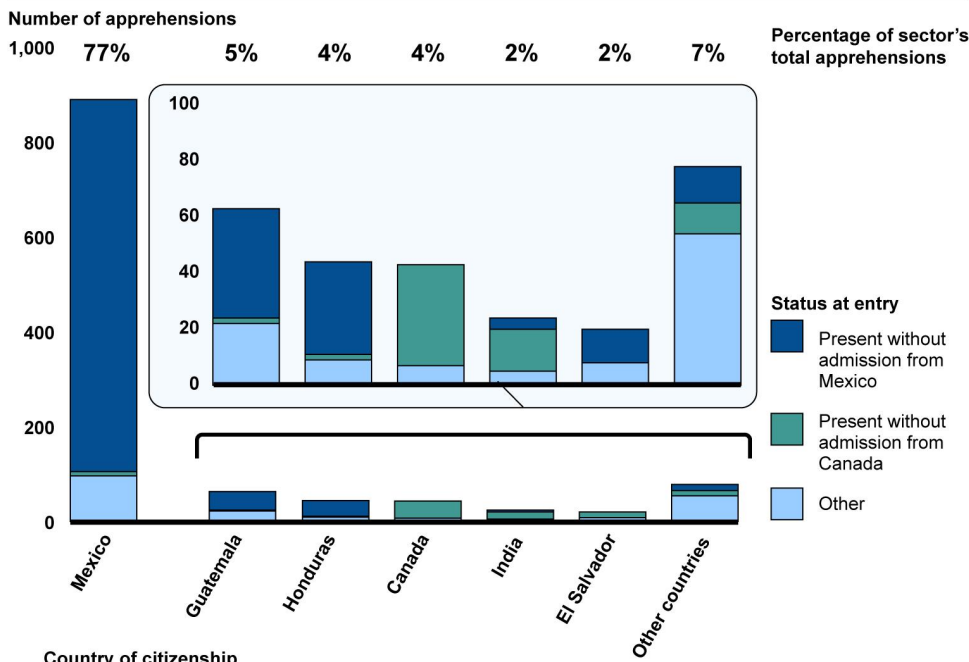
Figure 7: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Spokane Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

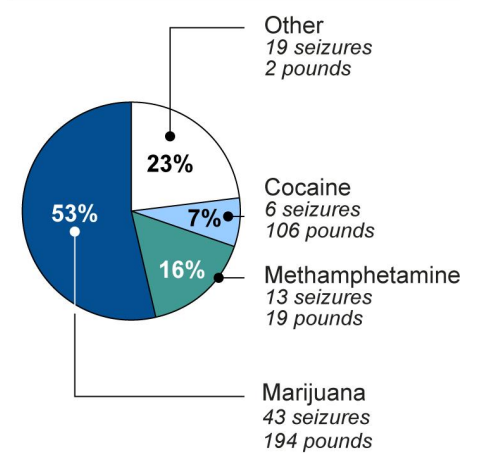
The map depicts Spokane sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 1,161 apprehensions in Spokane sector accounted for approximately 8 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Mexican citizens (77 percent). Spokane sector apprehended 75 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 885 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Spokane sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Spokane sector accounted for approximately 5 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of marijuana (53 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada. Spokane sector established a station in Spokane in fiscal year 2018, but this map is based on data from fiscal years 2013 through 2017, so its data are not included above. Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Havre, Montana

Sector profile

U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector spans the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountain Range. The sector's geography is mountainous and heavily forested in the western portion of Montana and generally flat or rolling prairies in the central and eastern portions of Montana. The border area of Havre sector's area of responsibility is sparsely populated, with no large population centers within 100 miles of the U.S. border. Havre sector is also responsible for three areas that have a body of water on both sides of the international border—the Milk River, the Poplar River, and Waterton Lake. Urban areas in the sector include Billings, Montana (population 110,000) and Great Falls, Montana (population 59,000).

Table 4: U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector's Area of Responsibility

Area of responsibility	Montana ^a , Eastern Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah
Border miles	456 miles of land border
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	217 authorized and 177 onboard
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Havre, Malta, Plentywood, Scobey, Saint Mary, Sweetgrass
Air and Marine Operations support	Bellingham Air and Marine Branch – Montana Air Unit

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

^aHavre sector's area of responsibility includes the majority of Montana. Spokane sector's area of responsibility includes a western portion of Montana.

Figure 8: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector's Area of Responsibility



Border marker designating the international border between the United States and Canada.

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection. | GAO-19-470

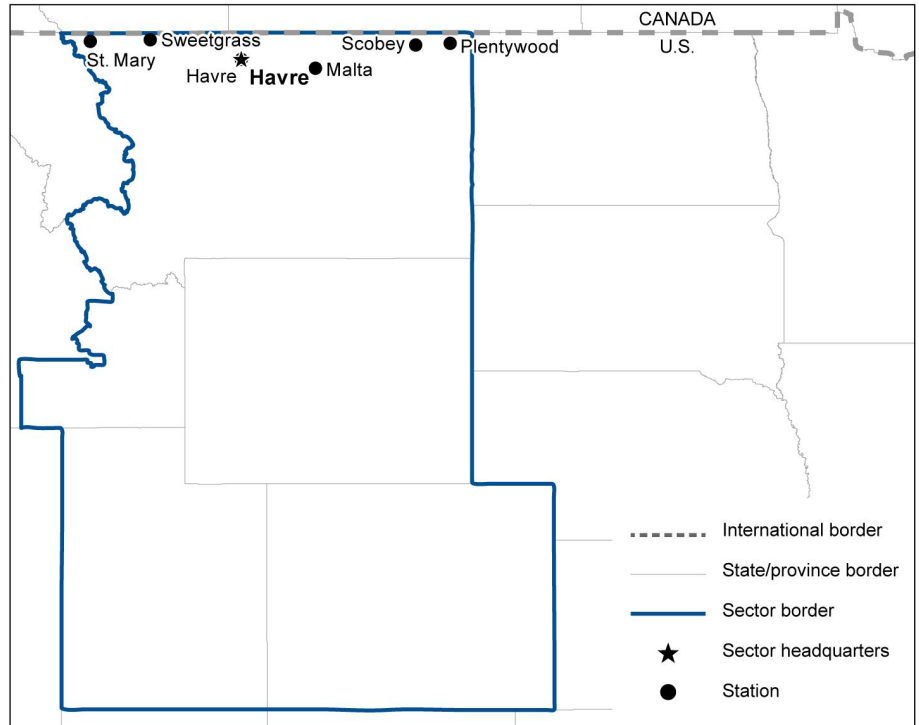


Border markers designating the international border between the United States and Canada.

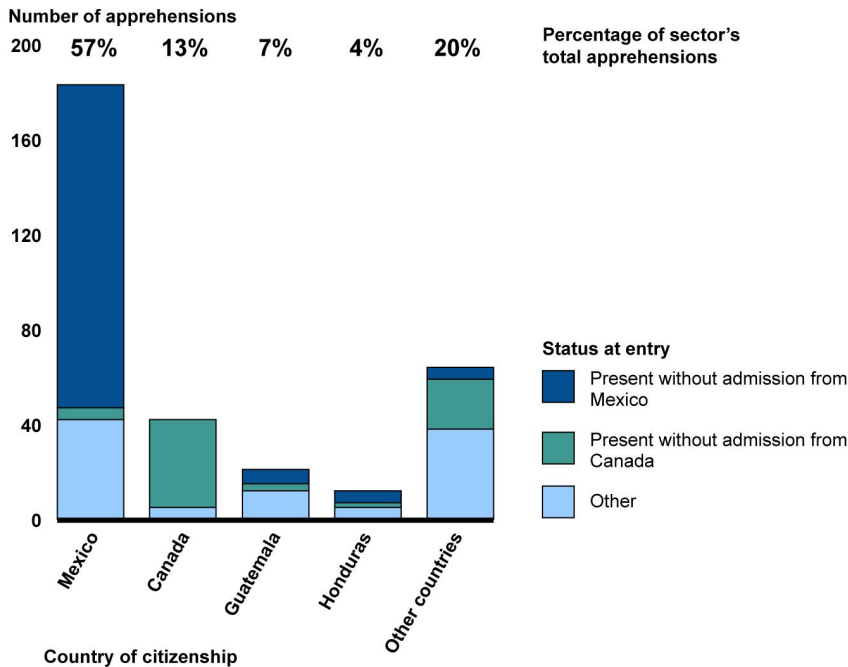
Figure 9: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Havre Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

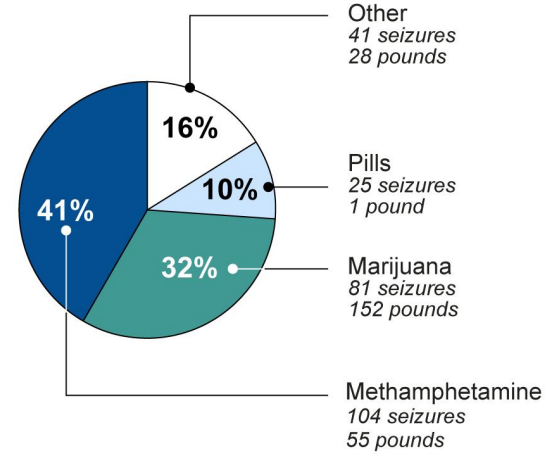
The map depicts Havre sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 322 apprehensions in Havre sector accounted for approximately 2 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Mexican citizens (57 percent) and Canadian citizens (13 percent). Havre sector apprehended 68 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 152 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Havre sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Havre sector accounted for approximately 15 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of methamphetamine (41 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada. Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Grand Forks, North Dakota

Sector profile

U.S. Border Patrol Grand Forks Sector's geography includes predominately flat, open plains and farmland in the sparsely populated western portion of the sector. The sector's more heavily populated eastern portion includes Lake Superior (one of the five Great Lakes), the Lake of the Woods, the Namakan Basin System, Sandpoint Lakes, and the Rainy River watershed. The sector's eastern portion also contains Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, a vast border wilderness area of forests, lakes and rivers managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Urban areas in the sector include Grand Forks, North Dakota (population 57,000) and Duluth, Minnesota (population 86,000).

Table 5: U.S. Border Patrol Grand Forks Sector's Area of Responsibility

Area of responsibility	North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri
Border miles	861 miles, 403 miles of land border 458 miles of maritime border
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	203 authorized
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Bottineau, Duluth, Grand Marais, International Falls, Pembina, Portal, Warroad
Air and Marine Operations support	National Air Security Operations Center - Grand Forks

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

Figure 10: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Grand Forks Sector's Area of Responsibility



A Border Patrol all-terrain vehicle.



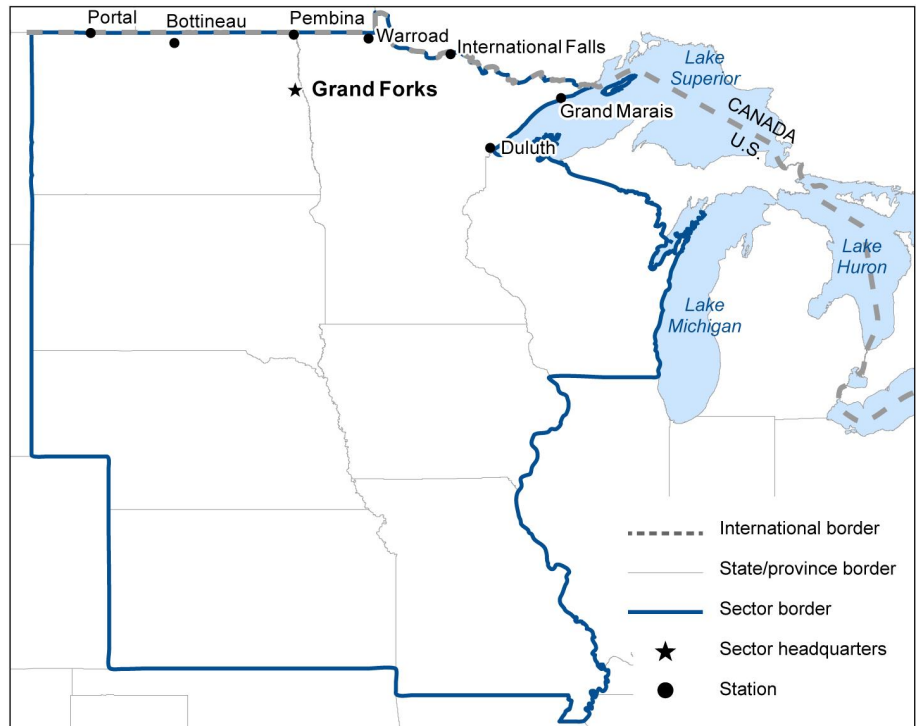
Winter terrain in Grand Forks sector's area of responsibility.

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection. | GAO-19-470

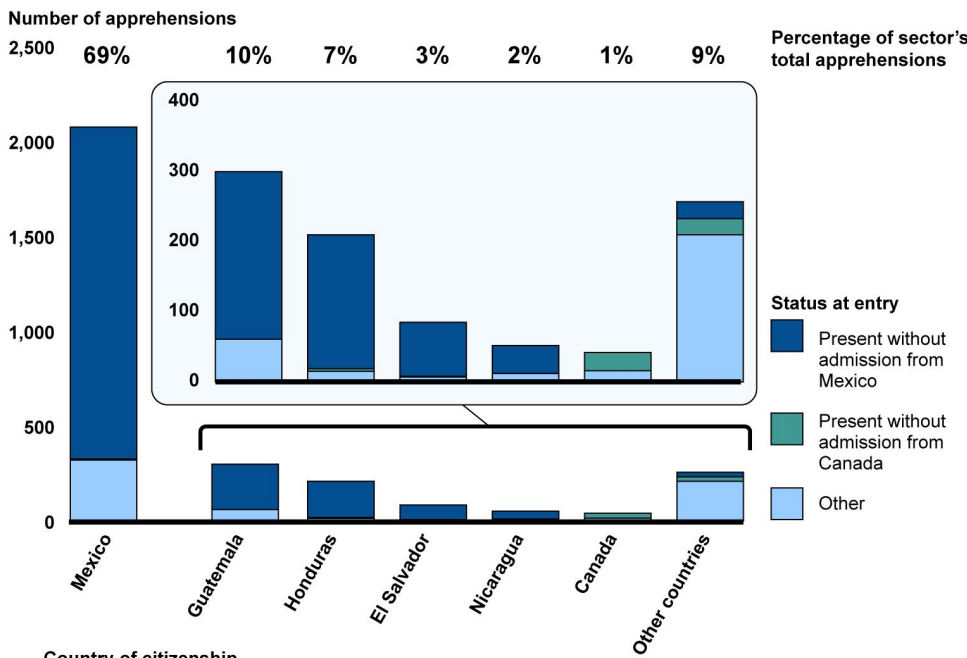
Figure 11: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Grand Forks Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

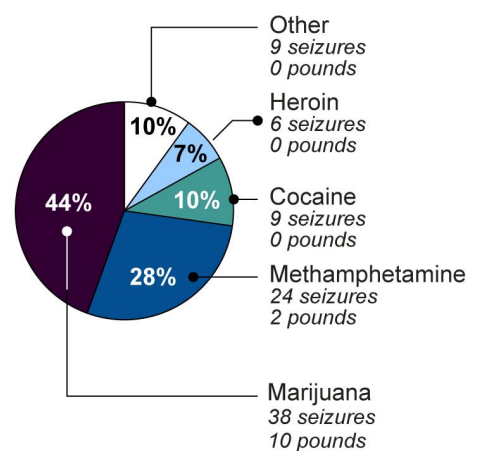
The map depicts Grand Forks sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 3,022 apprehensions in Grand Forks sector accounted for approximately 21 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Mexican citizens (69 percent) and Guatemalan citizens (10 percent). Grand Forks sector apprehended 59 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 2,320 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Grand Forks sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Grand Forks sector accounted for approximately 5 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of marijuana (44 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada. Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Detroit, Michigan

Sector profile

U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector’s geography includes 4 of the 5 Great Lakes (Lake Superior, Lake Huron, Lake Michigan, and the western portion of Lake Erie) and Lake St. Clair. Detroit sector is also responsible for the Detroit, St. Clair, and St. Mary’s rivers, all of which help to form the intentional boundary between the Canadian province of Ontario and the state of Michigan. Michigan’s upper peninsula is heavily forested, mountainous, and less populated than the relatively flat lower peninsula. Urban areas in the sector include Detroit, Michigan (population 673,000) and Toledo, Ohio (population 276,000).

Table 6: U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector’s Area of Responsibility

Area of responsibility	Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois
Border miles	863 miles, all of which is maritime border
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	421 authorized
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Detroit, Gibraltar, Marysville, Sandusky Bay, Sault Sainte Marie
Air and Marine Operations support	Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch – Chicago Air Unit and Sault Sainte Marie, Port Huron, Trenton, and Sandusky Marine Units

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

Figure 12: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector’s Area of Responsibility



Aerial view of Blue Water Bridge, an international crossing over the St. Clair River to Canada; United States at the bottom, Canada at the top.

River Road along the St. Clair River in Michigan; United States at the bottom, Canada at the top.

Source: GAO. | GAO-19-470

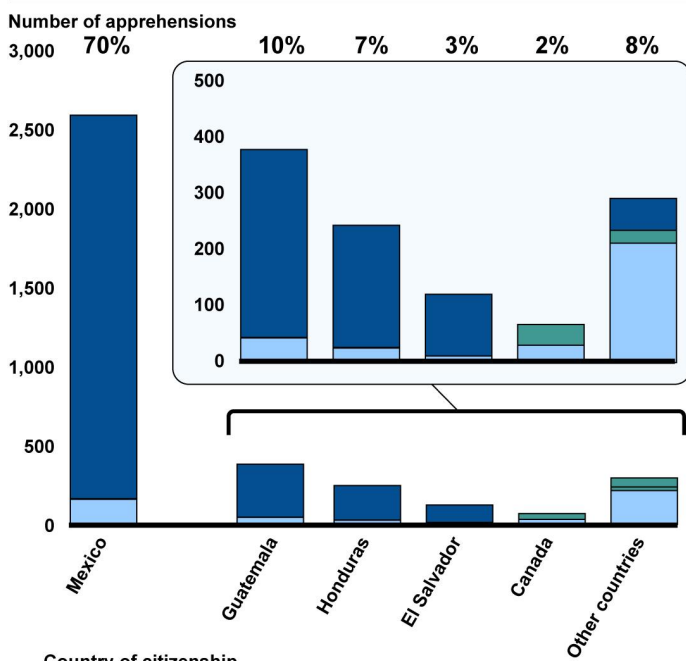
Figure 13: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Detroit Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

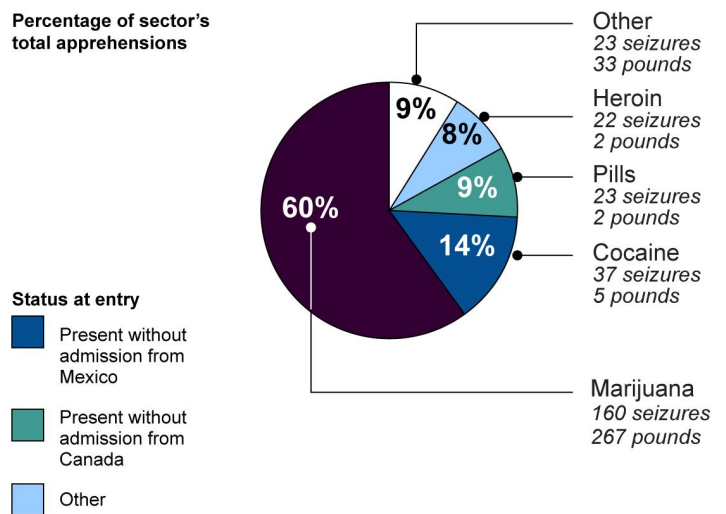
The map depicts Detroit sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 3,694 apprehensions in Detroit sector accounted for approximately 26 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Mexican citizens (70 percent) and Guatemalan citizens (10 percent). Detroit sector apprehended 66 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 3,144 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Detroit sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Detroit sector accounted for approximately 16 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of marijuana (60 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada.

Buffalo, New York

Sector profile

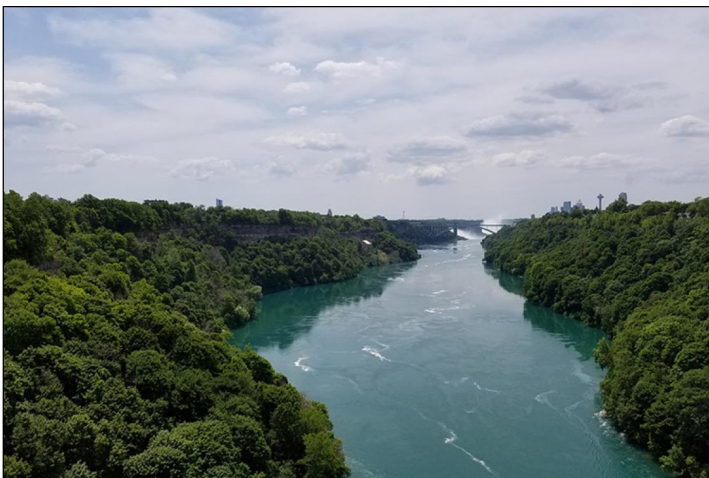
U.S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector's geography includes 2 of the 5 Great Lakes (Lake Ontario and the eastern portion of Lake Erie). Buffalo sector is also responsible for the Niagara River and the western portion of the Saint Lawrence River, which includes the Thousand Islands Region, a network of 1,864 islands. Urban areas include Buffalo, New York (population 259,000) and Rochester, New York (population 208,000).

Table 7: U.S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector's Area of Responsibility

Area of responsibility	Pennsylvania, Western New York, West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia
Border miles	341 miles, all of which is maritime border
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	289 authorized
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Buffalo, Erie, Oswego, Niagara Falls, Rochester, Wellesley Island
Air and Marine Operations support	Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch – Buffalo Air Unit and Erie, Buffalo, and Rochester Marine Units

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

Figure 14: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector's Area of Responsibility



View of the Lower Niagara River from a railway bridge; United States to the left, Canada to the right.



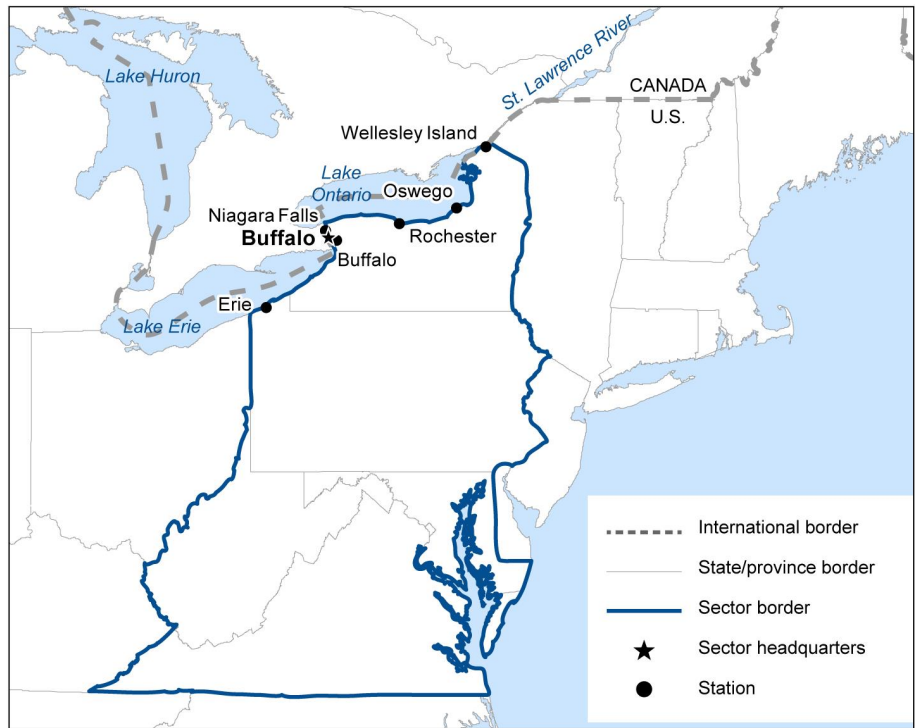
Border Patrol Riverine vessels patrolling on the Upper Niagara River.

Source: GAO. | GAO-19-470

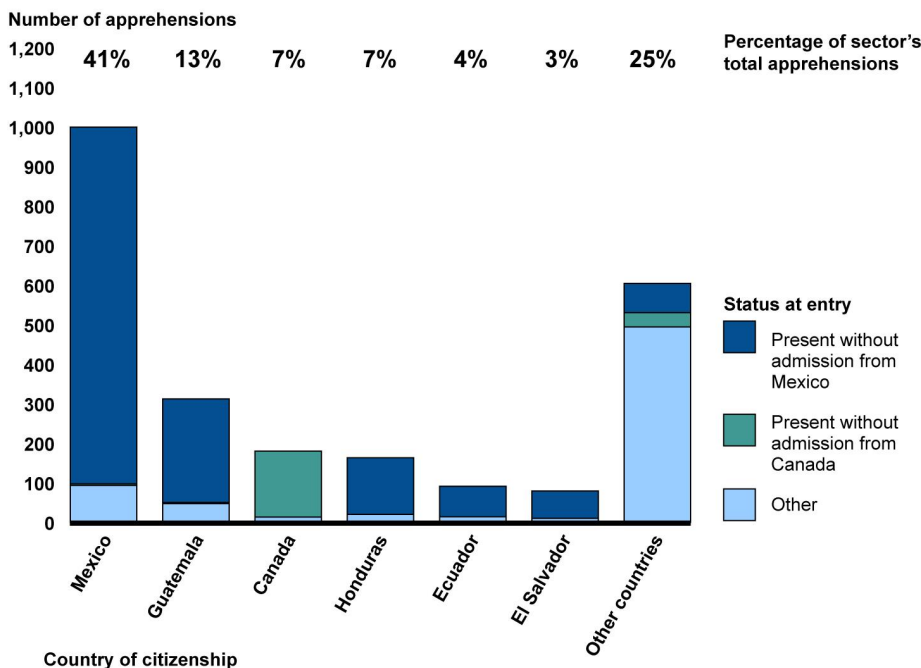
Figure 15: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

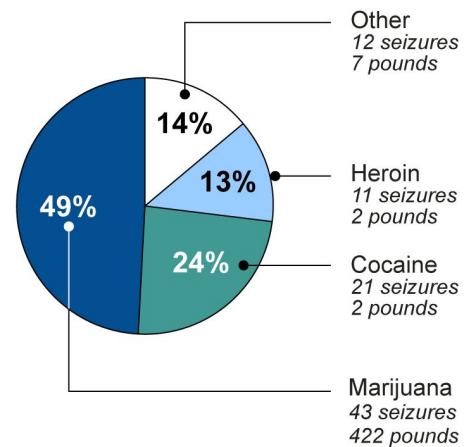
The map depicts Buffalo sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 2,428 apprehensions in Buffalo sector accounted for approximately 17 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Mexican citizens (41 percent) and Guatemalan citizens (13 percent). Buffalo sector apprehended 210 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 1,527 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Buffalo sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Buffalo sector accounted for approximately 5 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of marijuana (49 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada.

Swanton, Vermont

Sector profile

U.S. Border Patrol Swanton Sector's geography consists of mountainous areas, including the Adirondack Mountains in northeastern New York and the White Mountains in New Hampshire, as well as rolling lands and the Champlain Valley in Vermont. Swanton sector is responsible for Lake Champlain, Lake Memphremagog, and a portion of the Saint Lawrence River. Swanton sector's area of responsibility includes the Akwesasne Territory Zone, a Mohawk Nation land area that is approximately 44 square miles and borders New York and the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Urban areas in the sector include Burlington, Vermont (population 42,000).

Table 8: U.S. Border Patrol Swanton Sector's Area of Responsibility

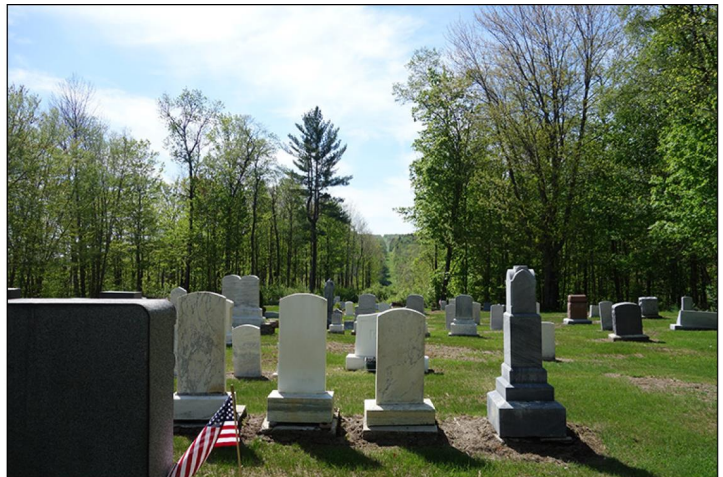
Area of responsibility	Eastern New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware
Border miles	295 miles, 203 miles of land border and 92 miles of maritime border
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	342 authorized
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Beecher Falls, Burke, Champlain, Massena, Newport, Ogdensburg, Richford, Swanton
Air and Marine Operations support	Manassas Air Branch – Plattsburgh Air Unit

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

Figure 16: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Swanton Sector's Area of Responsibility



Blackman Corners Road – a dead end road that stops at the U.S.-Canada border; United States in the forefront, Canada in the background.



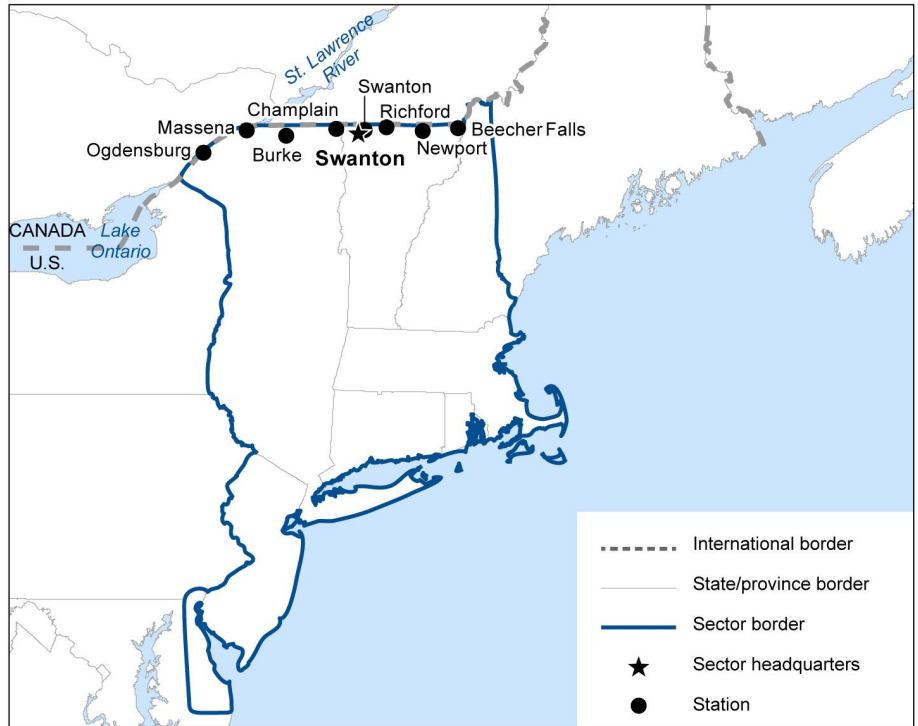
A cemetery on East Richford Slide Road which extends into Canada.

Source: GAO. | GAO-19-470

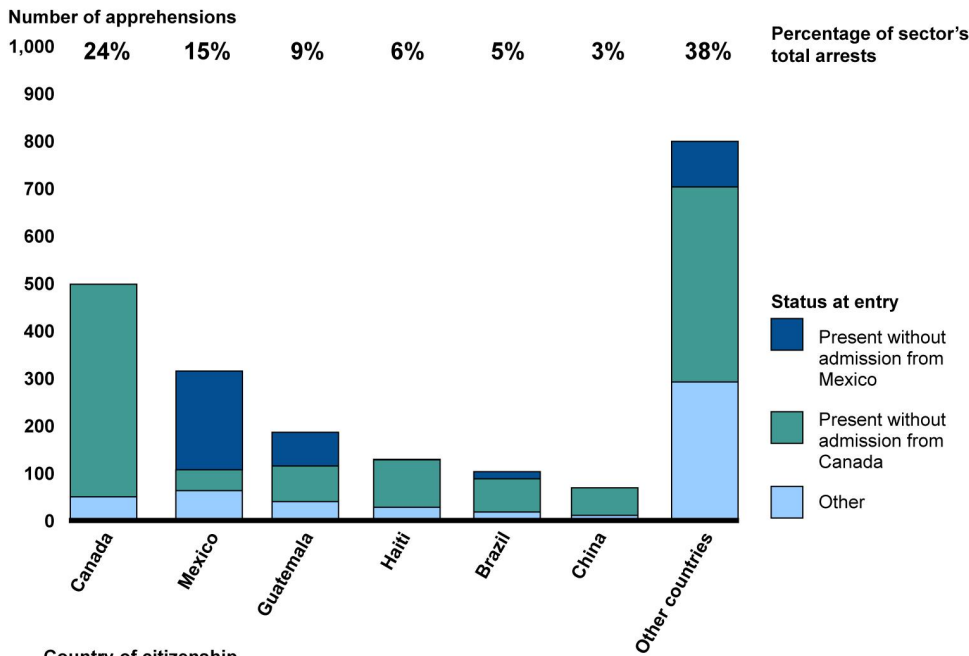
Figure 17: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Swanton Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

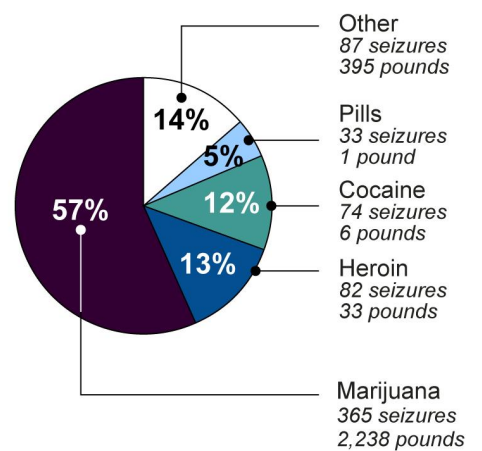
The map depicts Swanton sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 2,085 apprehensions in Swanton sector accounted for approximately 15 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Canadian citizens (24 percent) and Mexican citizens (15 percent). Swanton sector apprehended 1,206 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 391 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Swanton sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Swanton sector accounted for approximately 39 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of marijuana (57 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada. Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Houlton, Maine

Sector profile

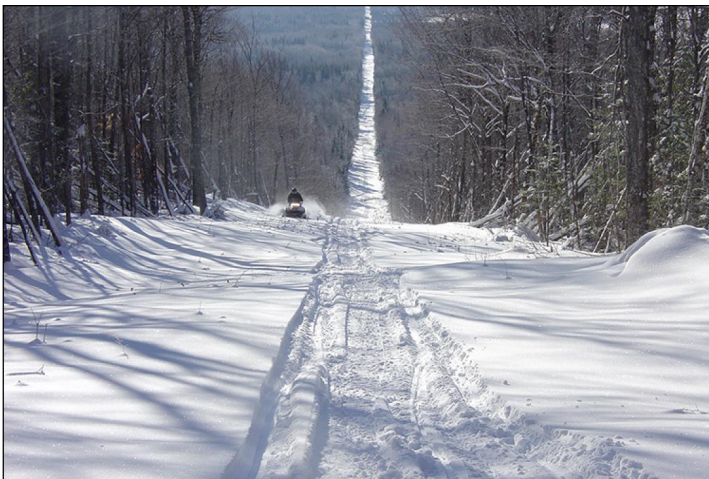
U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector's geography consists of farmlands with rolling hills, rugged mountains, dense forests, and coastal areas. The sector's western border area is comprised of densely forested, mountainous areas. The northwestern and northern border areas are comprised of thickly forested, rolling hills. The eastern border areas are a mix of rolling hills with forest and farmland. The coastal border zones are largely forested areas leading to rocky shorelines. Rivers, lakes, and streams, to include the Saint John and Saint Croix rivers, are prominent throughout the sector. Urban areas in the sector include Portland, Maine (population 67,000).

Table 9: U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector's Area of Responsibility

Area of responsibility	Maine
Border miles	611 miles, 286 miles of land border and 325 miles of maritime border
Number of Border Patrol agents as of September 2018	227 authorized
Name of U.S. Border Patrol stations	Calais, Fort Fairfield, Houlton, Jackman, Rangeley, Van Buren
Air and Marine Operations support	Manassas Air Branch – Houlton Air Unit

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

Figure 18: Selected Photos of U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector's Area of Responsibility



Border Patrol agent on a snowmobile patrolling along the "slash", the clear cut of vegetation or vista along the U.S.-Canada border.

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection. | GAO-19-470

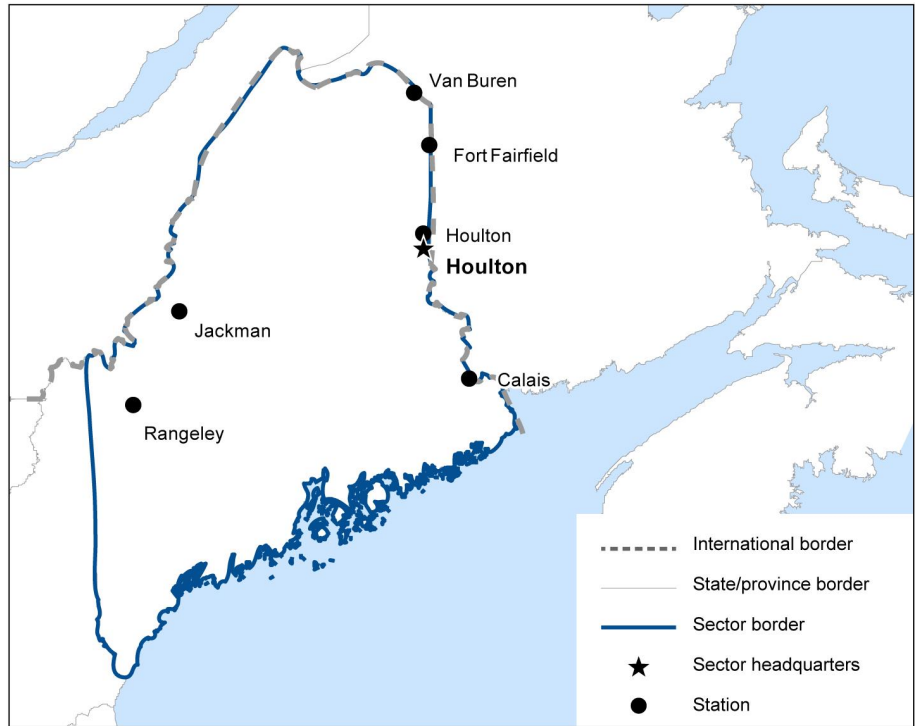


Border Patrol Riverine vessel on a patrol mission.

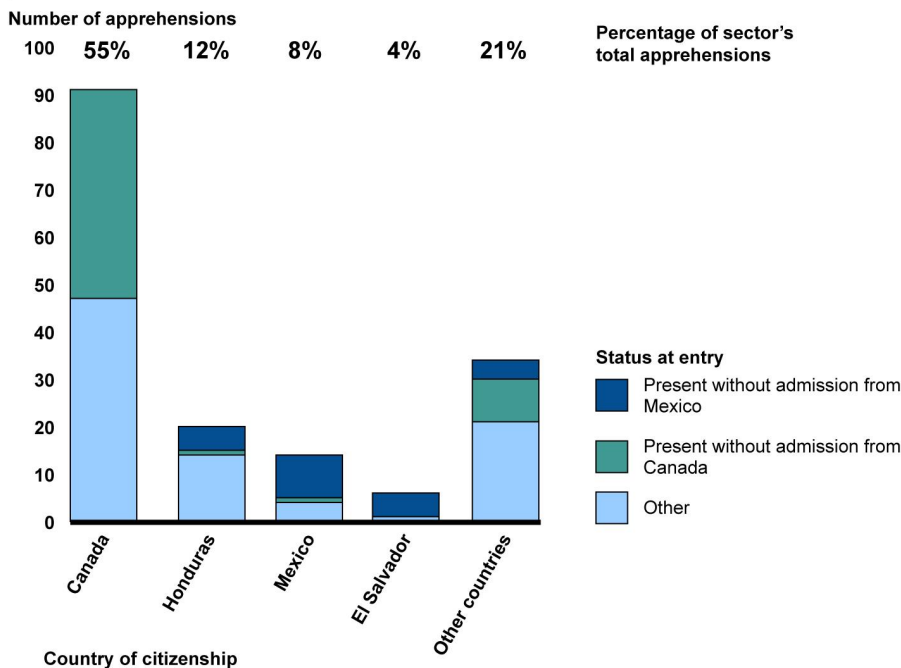
Figure 19: Map of U.S. Border Patrol Houlton Sector's Area of Responsibility and Apprehensions and Drug Seizures, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Overview

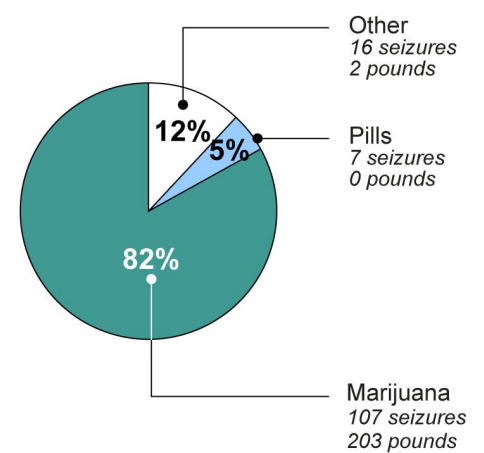
The map depicts Houlton sector's area of responsibility and sector headquarters and station locations. Depicted in the bar chart are apprehensions of potentially removable aliens. The 165 apprehensions in Houlton sector accounted for approximately 1 percent of all northern border apprehensions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of apprehensions was of Canadian citizens (55 percent) and Honduran citizens (12 percent). Houlton sector apprehended 55 individuals who were present without admission from Canada and 23 individuals who were present without admission from Mexico. Depicted in the pie chart is the number of drug seizures in Houlton sector's area of responsibility. Drug seizures in Houlton sector accounted for approximately 8 percent of all northern border drug seizures from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. The greatest proportion of seizures was of marijuana (82 percent).



Apprehensions by country of citizenship



Number of drug seizures by type



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: The "other countries" category is a combination of all remaining countries of citizenship of the apprehended individuals. These individuals can be categorized as present without admission from Canada or Mexico, even if they are not citizens of Canada or Mexico; for example, a citizen of Portugal who illegally entered the United States from Canada. Numbers may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Appendix III: Air and Marine Operations Northern Region Branches

Overview of Air and Marine Operations's Northern Region

Within U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Air and Marine Operations (AMO) conducts multifaceted missions consisting of direct support to U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) and collaborative efforts with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations and other federal, state, and local partner agencies. This includes, but is not limited to, investigative operations, surveillance missions, warrant service, and criminal apprehensions. AMO conducts missions along the U.S.-Canada (northern) border through three branches: Bellingham Air and Marine Branch in Bellingham, Washington; Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan; and Manassas Air Branch in Manassas, Virginia. Each branch is further divided into units to conduct air or maritime missions.¹

According to AMO data for fiscal years 2013 through 2017, AMO's Northern Region accounted for 14 percent and 22 percent of total AMO flight and float hours, respectively, as shown in table 10.² AMO implements a requirements determination process for annual aircraft flight and vessel float hours based on known mission requirements, funding levels, available assets, and the needs of law enforcement partners. Further, flight and float hours allocated across AMO's regions are prioritized through CBP's Flight and Float Hour Executive Oversight Council, which prioritizes flight and float hour allocations considering Department of Homeland Security and CBP's strategic objectives and border security requirements, threats, and capacity that will be executed over the course of the upcoming year. In February 2018, CBP also

¹Starting in fiscal year 2013 and ending in fiscal year 2017, AMO completed its Northern Border Strategic Realignment Plan, which focused on balancing resources against identified threats, beginning with a review of personnel, assets, funding, enforcement results, and mission performance which found, since AMO's creation in 2005, enforcement actions along the southwest and southeast borders continued to outpace enforcement actions along the northern border. Specifically, the Northern Border Strategic Realignment Plan used a fiscal year 2012 return-on-investment data analysis which illustrated a large disparity in enforcement results between AMO's regions. Recommendations from this analysis led to AMO consolidating its Northern Region into three branches and redeploying vessels, aircraft, and personnel from its Northern Region to its Southwest and Southeast Regions. According to AMO officials, the Northern Border Strategic Realignment Plan's structured 5-year implementation allowed AMO to reduce resources while minimizing national risk. According to AMO officials, AMO continues to regularly evaluate its levels of staffing and resources in all of its regions to identify any needs for redistribution to support Department of Homeland Security initiatives.

²Border Patrol agents assigned to riverine units operate vessels along the northern and U.S.-Mexico (southwest) borders. For example in fiscal year 2017, Border Patrol sectors along the northern and southwest borders reported 14,046 and 64,832 riverine float hours, respectively.

created the Flight and Float Hour Executive Steering Committee comprised of Border Patrol and AMO executive leadership to perform periodic audits of flight hour execution, review changing operational environments, validate planning assumptions, and perform an evaluation on overall return on investment to best ensure that CBP asset utilization is consistently aligned with its priorities and threats.

Table 10: Total Air and Marine Operations Flight and Float Hours by Region, Fiscal Years 2013 through 2017

Region	Total flight hours	Percent of total flight hours	Total float hours	Percent of total float hours
Headquarters and Centers	10,212	2	11,479	6
National Air Security Operations Centers	80,567	18	N/A	N/A
Northern Region	62,397	14	43,649	22
Southeast Region	57,552	13	99,258	51
Southwest Region	245,272	54	41,314	21
Total	456,000	100	195,700	100

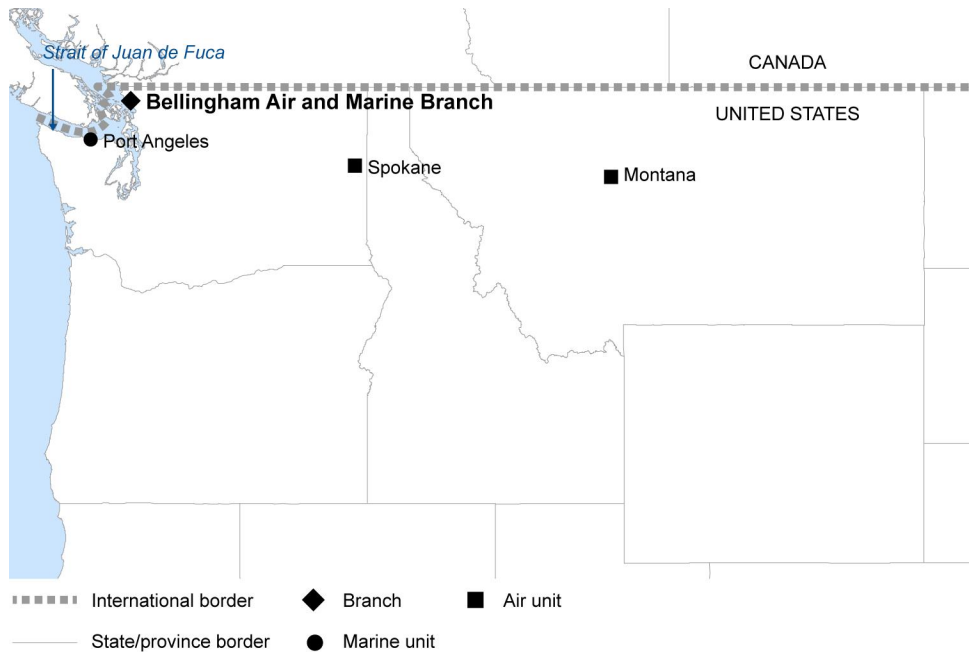
Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-19-470

Note: We rounded the percentages in this table to the nearest whole percent. As a result, the sum of the percentages for total flight hours does not equal 100 percent. N/A stands for not applicable.

Bellingham Air and Marine Branch

AMO's Bellingham Air and Marine Branch is located in Bellingham, Washington, and is comprised of the Spokane and Montana Air Units and Port Angeles and Bellingham Marine Units. For a map of those operating locations, see figure 20. As of the end of September 2018, Bellingham Air and Marine Branch had 38 authorized Air Interdiction Agent positions and 20 authorized Marine Interdiction Agent positions.

Figure 20: Map of Bellingham Air and Marine Branch's Area of Operations



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: Bellingham Marine Unit is co-located with Bellingham Air and Marine Branch.

According to data provided by AMO for fiscal years 2013 through 2017, missions completed by Bellingham Air and Marine Branch resulted in:

- 51 apprehensions of potentially removable aliens;
- 963 arrests of individuals; and
- 536 drug seizures, including: 204 methamphetamine seizures (1,033 pounds); 93 cocaine seizures (778 pounds); 155 heroin seizures (305 pounds); 65 marijuana seizures (14,132 pounds); and 19 other drug seizures (608 pounds).

Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch

AMO's Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch is located at Selfridge Air National Guard Base, Michigan and is comprised of the Buffalo and Chicago Air Units and the Sault Sainte Marie, Port Huron, Trenton, Sandusky, Erie, Buffalo, and Rochester Marine Units. For a map of those operating locations, see figure 21. As of September 2018, Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch had 27 authorized Air Interdiction Agent positions and 49 authorized Marine Interdiction Agent positions.

Figure 21: Map of Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch's Area of Operations



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

Note: Buffalo Air Unit is co-located with Buffalo Marine Unit.

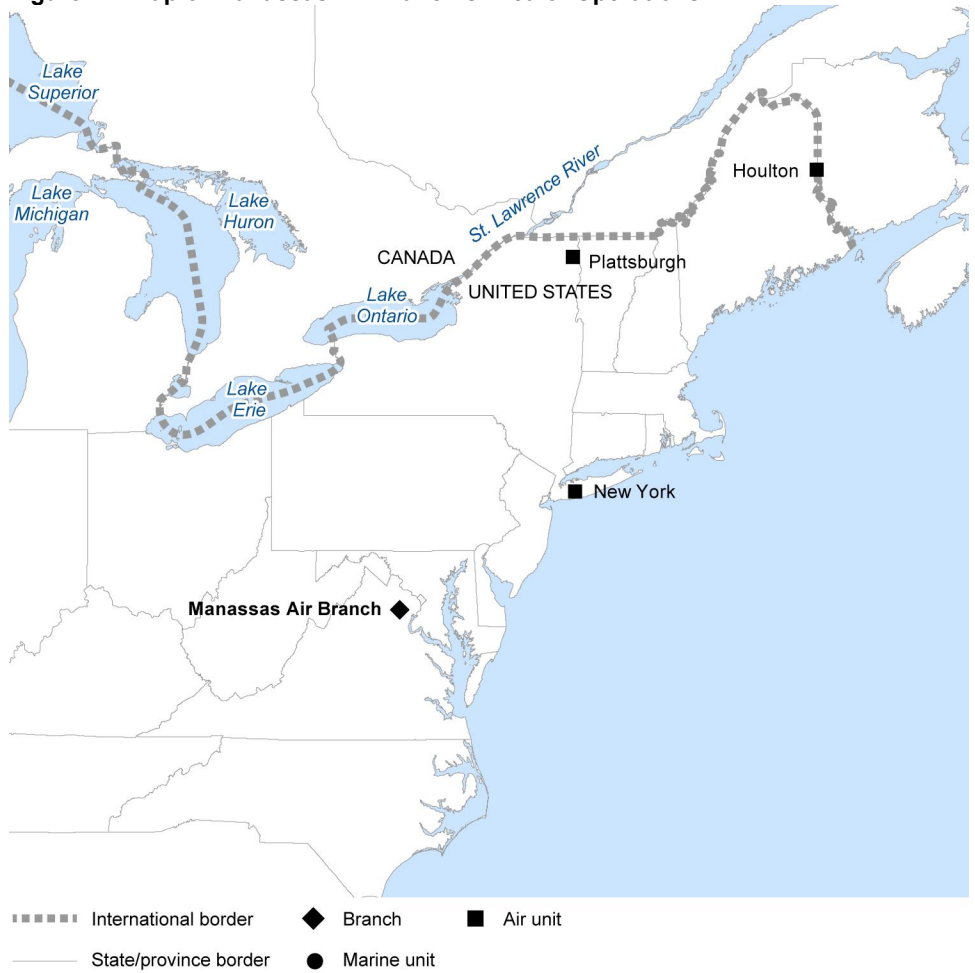
According to data provided by AMO for fiscal years 2013 through 2017, missions completed by Great Lakes Air and Marine Branch resulted in:

- 157 apprehensions of potentially removable aliens;
- 2,571 arrests of individuals; and
- 1,475 drug seizures, including: 553 marijuana seizures (6,974 pounds); 474 cocaine seizures (4,408 pounds); 296 heroin seizures (425 pounds); 87 methamphetamine seizures (1,347 pounds); and 65 other drug seizures (107 pounds).

Manassas Air Branch

AMO's Manassas Air Branch is located in Manassas, Virginia, and is comprised of the New York, Plattsburgh, and Houlton Air Units. For a map of those operating locations, see figure 22. As of September 2018, Manassas Branch had 35 authorized Air Interdiction Agent positions.

Figure 22: Map of Manassas Air Branch's Area of Operations



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; MapInfo (map). | GAO-19-470

According to data provided by AMO for fiscal years 2013 through 2017, missions completed by Manassas Air Branch resulted in:

- 57 apprehensions of potentially removable aliens;
- 1,347 arrests of individuals; and
- 472 drug seizures, including: 161 marijuana seizures (12,015 pounds); 141 heroin seizures (141 pounds); 134 cocaine seizures (707 pounds); 25 methamphetamine seizures (39 pounds); and 11 other drug seizures (107 pounds).

Appendix IV: Irregular Northbound Migration from the United States to Canada

Irregular northbound migration—northbound movement of foreign nationals from the United States across the northern border into Canada between official ports of entry typically to make an asylum claim—increased in 2017. Specifically, in 2017 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police reported approximately 20,000 irregular northbound migrants intercepted between official ports of entry.¹ The majority of interceptions were reported in the province of Quebec (91 percent) with additional interceptions noted in Manitoba (5 percent) and British Columbia (3 percent). In comparison, from 2012 to 2016 the total number of asylum claimants for all of Canada (including at and between official ports of entry) ranged from approximately 10,000 to 24,000 per year. The total number of asylum claimants for all of Canada (including at and between official ports of entry) increased from approximately 24,000 claimants in 2016 to approximately 50,000 claimants in 2017.

According to Border Patrol officials, in 2017 the number of individuals crossing from the United States into Canada, other than those crossing through official ports of entry, increased within 3 of 8 Border Patrol sectors along the northern border: Blaine, Washington; Grand Forks, North Dakota; and Swanton, Vermont.

- **Blaine Border Patrol Sector.** The number of individuals entering Canada between official ports of entry in British Columbia, north of Blaine sector's area of responsibility, known to Border Patrol was approximately 1,200 individuals during the 4-year period from 2012 through 2015, according to sector officials. In 2016, the number of individuals known to Blaine sector increased to approximately 1,100 individuals, and then increased again to approximately 1,400 individuals in 2017.
- **Grand Forks Border Patrol Sector.** The number of individuals entering Canada between official ports of entry in Manitoba, north of Grand Forks sector's area of responsibility, known to Border Patrol was approximately 580 individuals during the 4-year period from 2012 through 2015, according to sector officials. In 2016, the number of individuals known to Grand Forks sector increased to approximately 400 individuals, and then increased to approximately 1,000 individuals in 2017.

¹The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are responsible for border security between ports of entry. "Royal Canadian Mounted Police interceptions" refers to asylum seekers apprehended between the ports of entry and does not reflect other types of border crossings, illegal or otherwise.

- **Swanton Border Patrol Sector.** The number of individuals entering Canada between official ports of entry in Quebec, north of Swanton sector's area of responsibility, known to Border Patrol was approximately 1,000 individuals during the 4-year period from 2012 through 2015, according to sector officials. In 2016, the number of individuals known to Swanton sector increased to approximately 1,100 individuals, and then increased to approximately 16,800 individuals in 2017. According to Swanton Border Patrol Sector officials, the majority of known entries into Canada by irregular northbound migrants between official ports of entry have occurred along Roxham Road in Champlain, New York. For a photo of a facility constructed by the government of Canada to process irregular northbound migrants north of Roxham Road, see figure 23.

Figure 23: Photograph of the U.S.-Canada Border on Roxham Road, Champlain, New York on May 24, 2018



Source: GAO. | GAO-19-470

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Border Patrol officials we met with identified a bi-national agreement associated with the increased number of irregular northbound migrants from the United States to

Canada from 2016 through 2017. Irregular northbound migrants entering Canada between official ports of entry are not subject to the framework established by the 2002 Safe Third Country Agreement signed by Canada and the United States, which governs the processing of asylum claims along the shared land border and applies only to those individuals entering at an official port of entry, not between ports of entry.² Therefore, individuals who enter Canada by land between official ports of entry to make an asylum claim may be allowed to stay in Canada rather than have their claim handled by the United States. Individuals seeking to travel to Canada to make an asylum claim, whether or not they may have a valid asylum claim, are made aware of the potential ability to enter and remain in Canada pending an asylum decision due to wide sharing of this information through social media and reporting in the press. Otherwise, for those attempting to enter Canada through an official land port of entry to claim asylum, claimants may be returned to pursue their asylum claim in the country of last presence, which would be the United States, unless they qualify for one of the exceptions in the agreement.

According to DHS officials, Canadian data indicates a large percentage of irregular northbound migrants had previously obtained nonimmigrant visas, primarily B1/B2 visas, which authorized their temporary travel to the United States, and subsequently entered Canada between official ports of entry to claim asylum.³ DHS, in collaboration with the U.S. Department of State, worked to identify, and as appropriate, revoke visas of individuals seeking to enter Canada between official ports of entry.⁴ Border Patrol intelligence reporting in 2017 identified visa fraud concerns because individuals obtained visas to enter the United States, when it appeared that their main intention was to enter Canada other than through a port of entry and claim asylum.

Border Patrol officials stated that the widespread perception among irregular northbound migrants they encounter is that Canada's asylum

²The Safe Third Country Agreement, signed between Canada and the United States in 2002, came into effect in 2004 and generally requires that individuals seeking asylum make their claim for protection in the first safe country in which they arrive.

³B visas are nonimmigrant visas for persons who want to enter the United States temporarily for business (visa category B-1), tourism, pleasure, or visiting (visa category B-2), or a combination of both purposes (B-1/B-2).

⁴According to DHS officials, this effort included collaboration among DHS, Border Patrol, U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center, and the U.S. Department of State's bureaus of Diplomatic Security and Consular Affairs.

policies are more welcoming than those of the United States, which has also contributed to the increased trend in irregular northbound migration. These officials cited both U.S. and Canadian reporting on the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, along with a welcoming statement by the government of Canada, and perceived generosity of benefits upon application for asylum in Canada as reasons that migrants seek to enter Canada between official ports of entry and claim asylum.

According to Border Patrol officials, the northbound asylum flows from the United States to Canada could potentially lead to future attempts to enter the United States illegally between ports of entry from Canada by individuals whose asylum claims are rejected by the government of Canada. According to anecdotal reporting to Border Patrol officials, some of the irregular northbound migrants who entered Canada from the United States were unable to gain status in Canada or the process was not what they had anticipated. According to the officials, these individuals subsequently attempted to reenter the United States in an effort to gain legal status in the United States. For example, Swanton Border Patrol Sector reported two incidents in April 2018 in which groups of individuals who were apprehended attempting to illegally enter the United States from Canada stated that they were seeking to reenter the United States after their asylum claims were rejected by the government of Canada.

Appendix V: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security



May 24, 2019

Rebecca Gambler
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management Response to Draft Report GAO-19-470 “Northern Border Security: CBP Identified Resource Challenges but Needs Performance Measures to Assess Security Between Ports of Entry”

Dear Ms. Gambler:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO’s positive recognition of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) as the nation’s largest federal law enforcement agency. CBP’s U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) and Air and Marine Operations (AMO) are the uniformed law enforcement arms responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the air, land, and maritime environments. CBP participates in a variety of collaborative efforts including task forces, joint operations, and partnerships with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to support its efforts to secure the northern border. For example, in May 2018, AMO began working with the Department of Defense testing technology along the northern border to address gaps in air radar coverage. CBP also collaborates with law enforcement agencies within the government of Canada through the Cross-Border Law Enforcement Advisory Committee and Integrated Border Enforcement Team Program to gather and share information on cross border illegal activities.

Executive Order 13767, “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements,” dated January 25, 2017, called for operational control (OPCON) of the southwest border. USBP began a comprehensive process for establishing a framework that captures the basic components of OPCON. This framework was designed to be applicable, using tailored weighing mechanisms, not only to the southwest border, but also to northern and

coastal borders. USBP identified enduring elements that, regardless of border area, make up OPCON – Situational Awareness, Impedance and Denial, and Law Enforcement Response and Resolution. The three elements were expanded by developing enduring states or outcomes, mission tasks, and a set of associated measures for each element. USBP has distributed guidance requiring that planning structure for all sectors be based on operational plans to improve each of the three elements of OPCON. In addition, USBP held a training session for each of the 20 sector representatives on the OPCON framework. The framework was tested and implemented early in fiscal year (FY) 2019 in Big Bend Sector, a sector with very similar traits in terrain and resources to northern border sectors. Application of the OPCON framework to each of the northern border sectors will begin in October 2019.

The draft report contained two recommendations with which the Department concurs. Attached find our detailed response to each recommendation. Technical comments were previously provided under separate cover.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,



for JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

**Attachment: Management Response to Recommendations
Contained in GAO-19-470**

GAO recommended that the Chief of Border Patrol:

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement performance measures to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry.

Response: Concur. The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) will utilize the Operational Control (OPCON) Framework, tailored and weighted to the unique conditions of each station within each northern border sector, to assess the effectiveness of securing the northern border between ports of entry. See below for specific actions and milestones:

- Distribute Planning Guidance from headquarters (HQ) to sectors for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Master Concepts of Operations (CONOP), which will require planning against the three OPCON elements – June 30, 2019.
- Preliminary planning for expanding scope of OPCON framework application to northern border sectors – September 30, 2019.
- Sector submission to HQ of FY 2020 Master CONOPs, which will use the achievement of the elements in the OPCON framework to mark progress in improving operational control – October 31, 2019.
- Evaluate FY 2019 CONOPS from all sectors on a quarterly basis, to determine how well sector plans are working to improve the three OPCON elements – November 30, 2019
- USBP feedback and approval of FY 2020 sector master CONOPs – December 31, 2019.
- USBP will begin work with individual sectors and line stations on the Northern Border, to tailor OPCON framework to the northern border environment, including the establishment of weighting mechanisms for the OPCON taxonomy and introduction of any additional measures that may be needed to evaluate success in obtaining operational control on the Northern Border. As the framework measures are finalized these will also be used in the Master CONOPs for the northern border sectors – September 30, 2020.
- Finalize analysis and baselining of OPCON framework for all northern border sectors, with ability to use the OPCON framework to gauge operational

effectiveness on the Northern Border by the beginning of FY 2022 –
September 30, 2021.

- Evaluate FY 2020 CONOPs from all sectors on a quarterly basis, to determine how well sector plans are working to improve the three OPCON elements – November 30, 2021.
- Final coordination to obtain approvals needed to institutionalize the OPCON framework for the Northern Border, allowing USBP to close the recommendation – December 31, 2021.

Estimated Completion Date (ECD): December 31, 2021.

GAO recommended that the Executive Assistant Commissioner Air and Marine Operations (AMO):

Recommendation 2: Develop and implement performance measure to assess its effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry in the air and maritime environments.

Response: Concur. CBP AMO will develop and implement performance measure(s) to assess AMO effectiveness at securing the northern border between ports of entry. The point of contact for development and implementation is the Director, Northern Region. The Northern Region will establish an AMO-approved draft Performance Measure Definition Form by January 31, 2020 and request departmental approval by October 31, 2020. ECD: December 31, 2020.

Appendix VI: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgements

GAO Contact

Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov

Staff

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Christopher Ferencik (Assistant Director), David Alexander, Michele Fejfar, Eric Hauswirth, Grant Holyoak, John Mingus, Sasan J. “Jon” Najmi, Claire Peachey, Carl Potenzieri, and Natalie Swabb made key contributions to this report.

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