

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-473](#), a report to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The San Francisco Bay Delta watershed—which drains a vast area of California from the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the Pacific Ocean—supplies drinking water for 25 million people and provides irrigation for about half the nation's fruit and vegetable production. Decades of development and agriculture have led to large reductions in water quality and supply, natural flood protection, and habitats across the watershed's three major regions: the Bay, the Delta, and the upper watershed. Federal entities have been working with nonfederal entities for decades to protect and restore the watershed. GAO was asked to review restoration efforts in the watershed.

This report examines, among other objectives, (1) the extent to which federal and nonfederal entities coordinate watershed restoration efforts and (2) information on the status of these efforts and related expenditures for fiscal years 2007 through 2016, the most recent data available. GAO reviewed laws; regional databases, plans, and reports; and budget documents. It also surveyed the 72 members of interagency groups (48 responded) and interviewed federal and nonfederal officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made seven recommendations, including that Interior and CEQ update or revise the Interim Federal Action Plan and that Interior and OMB coordinate with the state to meet the CALFED Act's reporting requirements. Interior partially concurred with the recommendations, and CEQ and OMB neither agreed nor disagreed with them. GAO maintains its recommendations are valid.

View [GAO-18-473](#). For more information, contact J. Alfredo Gómez at (202) 512-3841 or gomezj@gao.gov.

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SAN FRANCISCO BAY DELTA WATERSHED

Wide Range of Restoration Efforts Need Updated Federal Reporting and Coordination Roles

What GAO Found

Federal entities, including the Department of the Interior, and nonfederal entities, such as California state agencies and nonprofits, carry out and coordinate a wide range of restoration efforts in the San Francisco Bay Delta watershed. These efforts have multiple benefits, such as improved water quality and habitat in restored marshland (see fig. below). The entities coordinate comprehensive efforts in the San Francisco Bay area (Bay) and Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta (Delta) through two groups. Federal efforts across the watershed are to be led and coordinated by Interior and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) through a 2009 Interim Federal Action Plan, but not all federal entities are using the plan. Interior officials said the plan is no longer relevant because state and federal roles have changed. For example, they said a state-led committee acts as the coordinating body for federal entities; however, this committee focuses on one region of the watershed, while federal funding supports efforts in all three regions. By updating or revising the Interim Action Plan, Interior and CEQ could help clarify federal roles in supporting restoration efforts in the watershed.

Restoration Project at the South Bay Salt Ponds in the San Francisco Bay Delta Watershed



Source: Cris Benton. | GAO-18-473

Photo shows transition from former industrial salt pond (left) to tidal marsh (right) through a restoration project by multiple federal and nonfederal entities. Map shows watershed's three regions.

Information on the status of all restoration efforts across the watershed, including their accomplishments, is unknown because information is not being fully collected or reported. Also, related expenditures for fiscal years 2007 through 2016 are unknown, in part because federal reports do not include complete or reliable data for restoration efforts in the watershed. The 2004 CALFED Bay-Delta Authorization Act requires Interior and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to report annually to Congress on restoration accomplishments and federal and state expenditures in the watershed, respectively. Interior has not issued these reports since 2009, when the state agency from which Interior had obtained the state data was abolished. OMB has issued its reports with federal, but not state, data for the same reason. However, Interior and OMB have not reached out to other state entities for this information. Without obtaining and reporting available information, as required by law, Interior and OMB will not have reasonable assurance that they are providing Congress with the information needed to monitor federal and nonfederal restoration efforts and expenditures.