

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-592](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies provide outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities on the hundreds of millions acres of lands and waters they manage, attracting hundreds of millions of visitors annually. These agencies include the seven that comprised the Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation: the Army Corps of Engineers, BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, National Park Service, and NOAA. However, federal agencies are not required to track spending for outdoor recreation, and it is unclear how much federal funding is spent, through various programs, on recreation.

The joint explanatory statement accompanying the Department of the Interior's fiscal year 2020 appropriation included a provision for GAO to conduct a study that identifies programs carried out by federal agencies that directly impact the outdoor recreation sector and that presents federal spending information for these programs. This report provides available information on what selected federal agencies know about their outdoor recreation spending.

GAO focused on the seven council member agencies; reviewed available data and documents on agency spending or funding that supports outdoor recreation; and interviewed agency officials to understand how, if at all, each agency identified its spending that supports outdoor recreation.

View [GAO-21-592](#). For more information, contact Nathan Anderson at (202) 512-3841 or andersonn@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL LANDS AND WATERS

Information on Agency Spending for Outdoor Recreation Is Limited

What GAO Found

The information that the seven federal agencies GAO reviewed have about their spending that supports outdoor recreation varies and is not intended to fully or precisely reflect all agency spending on recreation. The Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, and National Park Service identified budget lines related to outdoor recreation, although officials said this information may not accurately reflect the agencies' overall recreation spending. This is because some programs can support multiple purposes, so it can be difficult to determine how to divide a program's costs among its different purposes. For example, through its navigation program, the Army Corps of Engineers manages navigation locks, which benefit both commercial and recreational travel. The Bureau of Reclamation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) did not identify budget lines related to outdoor recreation.

Examples of Outdoor Recreation Activities on Federal Lands and Waters



Sources: (left to right) Neal Herbert/National Park Service; Forest Service; Fish and Wildlife Service. | GAO-21-592

Some agencies in our review provided spending information, while others provided funding information. The Army Corps of Engineers and Forest Service provided spending (expenditure) information, and BLM, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service provided funding (allotment) information. Funding represents amounts available to the agencies at a particular time but not necessarily actual spending.

- The Army Corps of Engineers' annual spending for its recreation program budget line averaged about \$292 million for fiscal years 2010 through 2019.
- The Forest Service's annual spending for its budget lines that it identified as supporting outdoor recreation averaged about \$225 million for fiscal years 2014 through 2019.
- BLM's annual funding for its budget lines that it identified as primarily supporting outdoor recreation averaged about \$77 million for fiscal years 2010 through 2019.
- The Fish and Wildlife Service's annual funding for its budget lines that it identified as primarily supporting outdoor recreation averaged about \$1.3 billion for fiscal years 2010 through 2019.
- The National Park Service's annual funding for its budget lines that it identified as primarily supporting outdoor recreation averaged about \$1.5 billion for fiscal years 2010 through 2019.