

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

The United States is rich in natural resources and beauty and, at the same time, home to a modern economy and high standard of living. These features underlie a way of life that is the envy of much of the world. However, they also pose a challenge to the American people and their elected officials—namely, how to balance the need to protect these resources for future generations with the need to use them for current economic growth? Every year, Congress faces this difficult question as it considers various bills related to natural resources matters.

Our Work

The Natural Resources and Environment team contributes to these deliberations by providing fact-based analyses on a wide range of issues. We are particularly focused on helping Congress's efforts to

- improve the safety and security of the nation's food supply;
- enhance the farm economy while maintaining stable and affordable food prices;
- improve management of the government's forests, parks, lands, and waters;
- ensure secure sources of energy for Americans at stable and affordable prices;
- improve and protect the nation's air and water quality;
- address multinational environmental issues;
- enhance efforts to clean up hazardous wastes;
- provide for safe and secure storage of nuclear wastes;
- prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons;
- oversee the government's nuclear weapons stockpile; and
- address science, technology, and intellectual property rights issues.

In doing this work, our headquarters and field analysts concentrate mainly on the programs of the Departments of Agriculture, Energy, and the Interior; the Environmental Protection Agency; the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; the Army Corps of Engineers; the National Science Foundation; the National Marine Fisheries Service; and the Patent and Trademark Office.

KEY CONTACTS

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Robert A. Robinson

DIRECTORS

Lawrence J. Dyckman
Barry T. Hill
Gary L. Jones
Anu Mittal
Robin M. Nazzaro
John B. Stephenson
James E. Wells, Jr.
Gene Aloise (Acting)
Eileen Larence (Acting)

PHONE

(202) 512-3841

MAILING ADDRESS

U.S. General Accounting Office
Natural Resources & Environment
Room 2T23
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Accomplishments and Key Projects

It is not unusual for our work to result in large financial benefits to the American taxpayer. For example, our analyses led the Department of Energy (DOE) to terminate a contract for treating radioactive wastes and award a new contract based on a different financing strategy. As a result, DOE expects to save about \$2.8 billion in fiscal years 2001 through 2005. In another case, Congress incorporated into legislation many of the provisions we had put forth as ways to stem the huge losses in farm loan programs, such as prohibiting delinquent borrowers from obtaining new loans. These provisions, coupled with parallel management actions, reduced loan losses by an estimated \$4.8 billion in fiscal years 1997 through 2001, and led us to remove these programs from GAO's "high-risk" list in 2001.

Our work was also instrumental in bringing about the following improvements:

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) implemented measures to improve the credibility of its scientific panels, such as strengthening procedures to better avoid potential conflicts of interests in the selection of panelists.
- The Food and Drug Administration adopted more stringent measures to prevent the importation of unsafe food products, such as imposing civil monetary penalties on violators and seizing shipments found to pose a serious health hazard.
- The Departments of State, Energy, and Defense undertook important steps to better coordinate and manage their nuclear nonproliferation activities, such as consolidating duplicative programs.
- The National Science Foundation (NSF) adopted procedures to better document the benefits realized by assigning NSF employees to nonfederal jobs on a temporary basis under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act.

Projects recently completed or now under way include studies of

- California's restructured electricity markets;
- the cleanup and restoration of Alaska's North Slope oil production facilities;
- the safety of food served in federal school meal programs;
- the proposed Yucca Mountain repository for storing nuclear waste;
- the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's oversight and regulatory activities;
- the Fish and Wildlife Service's oversight of endangered species programs;
- the Corps of Engineers' Everglades restoration project;
- U.S. efforts to combat nuclear smuggling;
- water quality impacts of urban sprawl; and
- intellectual property infringement claims.