

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-303](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

FWS awarded \$1.5 billion in grants in fiscal year 2016, which represented about half of the agency's budget. In general, FWS awards two types of grants: (1) formula grants, which are distributed to recipients based on a required formula, and (2) competitive grants, where potential recipients submit an application for funding that is reviewed and scored against criteria. Within FWS, WSFR manages several grant programs.

GAO was asked to review WSFR's management of its competitive grant programs. This report (1) identifies and describes competitive grant programs that WSFR awards and monitors; (2) examines how WSFR awards grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant regulations; and (3) examines how WSFR monitors grants under these programs and the extent to which this is consistent with relevant regulations. GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and FWS guidance; analyzed agency data for fiscal years 2012-2016; reviewed award documents for fiscal year 2016 and a sample of monitoring documents for grants awarded in fiscal year 2015 (selected to ensure sufficient time for required reports to be submitted) and compared these with requirements from relevant regulations; interviewed WSFR headquarters and regional officials and grant recipients.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FWS develop a template or other standardized method to facilitate collection of all required information for grant performance reports. The Department of the Interior concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-18-303](#). For more information, contact Anne-Marie Fennell at (202) 512-3841 or fennella@gao.gov.

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WILDLIFE AND SPORT FISH RESTORATION

Competitive Grant Programs Managed Consistently with Relevant Regulations, but Monitoring Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) program, within the Department of the Interior, awards and monitors five competitive grant programs. These grant programs fund different types of projects ranging from building docks to acquiring wetlands. GAO found that the number of grants and funding awarded varied by grant program from fiscal years 2012 through 2016.

Total Number of Grants and Federal Funding Awarded for Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Competitive Grant Programs, Fiscal Years 2012-2016^a

Dollars in thousands

Grant program	Boating Infrastructure Tier 2		Clean Vessel Act		Competitive State Wildlife		Multistate Conservation		National Coastal Wetlands Conservation	
	Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded	Grants awarded	Funding awarded
Total	69	\$51,459	149	\$67,646	122	\$24,235	78	\$26,375	120	\$94,369

Source: GAO analysis of Dept. of the Interior's Financial and Business Management System data. | GAO-18-303

^aData show awards and funding in the fiscal year in which funds were initially obligated to recipients.

The award process WSFR uses for the five competitive grant programs generally involves publicly announcing the grant opportunity through a Notice of Funding Opportunity, which contains information applicants need to consider when applying, such as available funding and criteria that will be used to score applications. A panel comprised of WSFR staff, and in some cases other FWS staff or a third party organization, reviews and scores the applications based on the criteria in the Notice of Funding Opportunity and develops a list of recommended projects and funding amounts. The list is forwarded to the Director of FWS for review and approval. GAO found that WSFR's grant award process is consistent with federal regulations for awarding federal grants.

WSFR monitors its competitive grants by reviewing financial and performance reports submitted by grant recipients. In general, this process is consistent with relevant regulations, but some of the performance reports were missing required information. Specifically, for fiscal year 2015 grants GAO reviewed, financial and performance reports were generally submitted on time by grant recipients, but several performance reports (9 of 51) did not include a comparison of actual accomplishments to the goals of the grant, as required by regulations. WSFR does not have a template for grant recipients to follow in preparing these reports for most of the grant programs, and the template used by one region does not clearly ask for all required information. WSFR officials have said the agency plans to develop a more standardized reporting process but no timeline has been established. According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, management should design control activities to achieve objectives and respond to risks, including designing mechanisms to help monitor performance. Without a template or standardized method that facilitates the collection of performance information, WSFR grant recipients may continue to submit performance reports that are missing information needed by FWS to monitor its competitive grant programs.