GAO’s Work on Climate Change and Climate Migration

Environmental Law Institute
July 26th, 2023

Micah McMillan
Natural Resources and Environment Team
U.S. Government Accountability Office
GAO’s High Risk Series: Limiting the Federal Government’s Fiscal Exposure by Better Managing Climate Change Risks

**Technical Assistance to Federal, Tribal, State, Local, and Private-Sector Decision Makers**

**Federal Insurance Programs**

**Rating changes since last update**
The rating for Monitoring increased from not met to partially met.

**Criteria still needing attention**
Leadership Commitment, Capacity, Action Plan, and Demonstrated Progress

**Disaster Aid and Resilience**

**Federal Government as Leader of National Climate Strategic Plan**

**Federal Government as Property Owner**

**Rating changes since last update**
The ratings for Capacity and Monitoring increased from not met to partially met.

**Criteria still needing attention**
Leadership Commitment, Capacity, Action Plan, Monitoring, and Demonstrated Progress
Two Categories of Recommendations

Agency Mainstreaming

• Water systems
• Roads and bridges
• Defense facilities
• Energy infrastructure
• Superfund sites

New Institutions

• National Climate Information System
• Identify high-priority adaptation projects
• Address climate migration
Disaster Resilience Framework

- Framework organized around 3 principles—information, integration, and incentives—and a series of questions.

- Framework principles can help:
  - Officials that manage federal agencies/programs consider actions they might take to increase resilience to natural hazards.
  - Identify gaps in existing federal efforts or analyze any type of existing federal effort.
Domestic Climate Migration

Methodology:
- Literature review.
- Interviews with experts and federal, state and local stakeholders.
- Case studies: Newtok, AK; Isle de Jean Charles, LA; Smith Island, MD; Santa Rosa, CA.

We found:
- Federal programs provide limited support to climate migration efforts.
- No federal agency has the authority to lead federal assistance for relocating communities.
- Lack of federal coordination has contributed to delays in Newtok and Isle de Jean Charles.

Climate Change: A Climate Migration Pilot Program Could Enhance the Nation’s Resilience and Reduce Federal Fiscal Exposure (GAO-20-488)
Domestic Climate Migration

We recommended:

Congress should consider establishing a pilot program with clear federal leadership to identify and provide assistance to communities that express affirmative interest in relocation as a resilience strategy.

Isle de Jean Charles Land Loss, 1963 to 2008

Climate Change: A Climate Migration Pilot Program Could Enhance the Nation’s Resilience and Reduce Federal Fiscal Exposure (GAO-20-488)
Domestic Climate Migration

Factors to consider when creating a pilot program:

- Promote community led planning.
- Address limited community capacity and access to funding.
- Promote coordination across all relevant levels of government.
- Emphasize public service delivery in receiving and migrating communities.

Source: G. Crulanger, Scholar Farms | GAO-20-488
Coffey Park Neighborhood, Santa Rosa, after the October 2017 Wildfire and in April 2019
Climate Change: A Climate Migration Pilot Program Could Enhance the Nation’s Resilience and Reduce Federal Fiscal Exposure (GAO-20-488)
Domestic Climate Migration

How will climate migration fit into government-wide climate resilience efforts?

- Climate change strategic planning (GAO-23-106203)
- National climate information system (GAO-16-37)
- Expanded use of climate change economics (GAO-17-720)
- Prioritizing climate resilience investments (GAO-20-127)
- Climate migration pilot program (GAO-20-488)

Climate Change: Summary of GAO’s Work on Federal Climate Resilience Projects (GAO-23-106362)
Barriers to Accessing Federal Programs

United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

**May 2022**

ALASKA NATIVE ISSUES

Federal Agencies Could Enhance Support for Native Village Efforts to Address Environmental Threats

United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Committees

**December 2022**

COVID-19 RELIEF FUNDS

Lessons Learned Could Improve Future Distribution of Federal Emergency Relief to Tribal Recipients
Barriers to Accessing Federal Programs

Common themes to reduce barriers:

- Reducing administrative and financial burden.
- Transferring appropriations among agencies to use existing mechanisms familiar to Tribes.
- Maximizing flexibility and longer timeframes.
- Coordinating across agencies and with partners.
- Targeted technical assistance.

We recommended:

- Agencies and/or an interagency coordinating body review programs and identify ways to address existing barriers. (GAO-22-104241)
- Congress consider enabling agencies to use existing mechanisms to provide future relief. (GAO-23-105473)