



Report in Brief

October 1, 2020

Background

On October 5, 2018, Congress enacted the Geospatial Data Act of 2018 (GDA) to foster efficient management of geospatial data, technologies, and infrastructure through enhanced coordination among the federal government, State and local authorities, the private sector, and academia. The GDA requires inspectors general of covered agencies to audit the agencies' collection, production, acquisition, maintenance, distribution, use, and preservation of geospatial data, not less than once every 2 years. This is our initial audit of the U.S. Department of Commerce (the Department) under the GDA.

Department geospatial data of national significance is collected, produced, acquired, maintained, distributed, used, and preserved by either the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) or the U.S. Census Bureau.

Why We Did This Review

Our original objectives—in accordance with the GDA—were to review the Department's (1) compliance with the standards for geospatial data, including metadata for geospatial data established under section 757; (2) compliance with the requirements under subsection 759(a); and (3) compliance on the limitation on the use of federal funds under section 759A.

We revised our audit objective to assess the Department's progress toward compliance with the requirements of subsection 759(a). Because the Department's National Geospatial Data Assets and management thereof reside within NOAA and the Census Bureau, we limited our scope to those two operating units and the activities of the Department's Senior Agency Official for Geospatial Information, Chief Data Officer, data governance board, and geospatial working group. (See appendix A for additional details.)

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

The Department Has Made Progress Meeting Its Responsibilities Under the Geospatial Data Act But Must Improve Controls to Ensure Full Compliance

OIG-21-001-A

WHAT WE FOUND

We found the Department has made progress towards complying with the 13 requirements under section 759(a). In addition, we noted the need for improvements in the following areas:

1. The Department should ensure its new geospatial data strategic plan aligns with the mission and design controls for adequate implementation.
2. The Department should develop procedures to ensure compliance with its *Policy on Planned Geospatial Acquisitions*.
3. Data harvesting issues are causing inconsistencies in Department metadata.
4. Census Bureau should document compliance with metadata standards as part of its system of internal control for geospatial data.

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

We recommend that the Deputy Secretary of Commerce and the Senior Agency Official for Geospatial Information do the following:

1. Ensure that the Department's geospatial data strategy aligns and integrates with the Department's mission and strategy.
2. Define a system of internal control to ensure the geospatial data strategic plan is effectively implemented and that progress against it is appropriately tracked.
3. Develop Department-wide procedures to ensure operating units consistently implement the *Department's Policy on Planned Geospatial Acquisitions*.
4. Work with the U.S. Department of the Interior to design internal control to ensure metadata on GeoPlatform is both accurate and current.
5. In the interim, work with the U.S. Department of the Interior to notify GeoPlatform users that some metadata may not be current.

We recommend that the Census Bureau's Chief of the Geography Division do the following:

6. Assess geospatial data standards licensing needs and ensure the bureau adequately documents compliance with data and metadata standards.