

December 2010

# BORDER SECURITY

## Enhanced DHS Oversight and Assessment of Interagency Coordination Is Needed for the Northern Border



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## Why GAO Did This Study

The challenges of securing the U.S.-Canadian border involve the coordination of multiple partners. The results of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to integrate border security among its components and across federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian partners are unclear. GAO was asked to address the extent to which DHS has (1) improved coordination with state, local, tribal, and Canadian partners; (2) progressed in addressing past federal coordination challenges; and (3) progressed in securing the northern border and used coordination efforts to address existing vulnerabilities. GAO reviewed interagency agreements, strategies, and operational documents that address DHS's reported northern border vulnerabilities such as terrorism. GAO visited four Border Patrol sectors, selected based on threat, and interviewed officials from federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian agencies operating within these sectors. While these results cannot be generalized, they provided insights on border security coordination.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DHS enhance oversight to ensure efficient use of interagency forums and compliance with interagency agreements; and develop guidance to integrate partner resources to mitigate northern border vulnerabilities. DHS concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-11-97](#) or key components. For more information, contact Rich Stana at (202) 512-8777 or [stanar@gao.gov](mailto:stanar@gao.gov).

## BORDER SECURITY

### Enhanced DHS Oversight and Assessment of Interagency Coordination Is Needed for the Northern Border

## What GAO Found

According to a majority of selected northern border security partners GAO interviewed, DHS improved northern border security coordination through interagency forums and joint operations. Specifically, interagency forums were beneficial in establishing a common understanding of security, while joint operations helped to achieve an integrated and effective law enforcement response. However, numerous partners cited challenges related to the inability to resource the increasing number of interagency forums and raised concerns that some efforts may be overlapping. While guidance issued by GAO stresses the need for a process to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently, DHS does not oversee the interagency forums established by its components. DHS oversight could help prevent possible duplication of efforts and conserve resources.

DHS component officials reported that federal agency coordination to secure the northern border was improved, but partners in all four sectors GAO visited cited ongoing challenges sharing information and resources for daily border security related to operations and investigations. DHS has established and updated interagency agreements, but oversight by management at the component and local level has not ensured consistent compliance with provisions of these agreements, such as those related to information sharing, in areas GAO visited. As a result, according to DHS officials, field agents have been left to resolve coordination challenges. Ongoing DHS-level oversight and attention to enforcing accountability of established agreements could help address long-standing coordination challenges between DHS components, and further the DHS strategic vision for a coordinated homeland security enterprise.

Border Patrol—a component of DHS's U.S. Customs and Border Protection—reported that 32 of the nearly 4,000 northern border miles in fiscal year 2010 had reached an acceptable level of security and that there is a high reliance on law enforcement support from outside the border zone. However, the extent of partner law enforcement resources available to address border security vulnerabilities is not reflected in Border Patrol's processes for assessing border security and resource requirements. GAO previously reported that federal agencies should identify resources among collaborating agencies to deliver results more efficiently and that DHS had not fully responded to a legislative requirement to link initiatives—including partnerships—to existing border vulnerabilities to inform federal resource allocation decisions. Development of policy and guidance to integrate available partner resources in northern border security assessments and resource planning documents could provide the agency and Congress with more complete information necessary to make resource allocation decisions in mitigating existing border vulnerabilities.

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## Abbreviations

BEST	Border Enforcement Security Task Force
CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
DOI	Department of the Interior
DOJ	Department of Justice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
HIDTA	High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
IBET	Integrated Border Enforcement Team
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
MOA	memorandum of agreement
MOU	memorandum of understanding
OIG	Office of Inspector General
ORBBP	Operational Requirements Based Budget Process
QHSR	Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
USCG	U.S. Coast Guard
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

December 17, 2010

### Congressional Requesters

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been challenged in its efforts to address the threat of illegal activity on the northern border, where the extent of illegal activity is unknown, but the risk of terrorist activity is high. The United States and Canada share the longest common nonmilitarized border between two countries, spanning nearly 4,000 miles of land and maritime border from Washington state to Maine. The terrain, which ranges from densely forested lands on the west and east coasts to open plains in the middle of the country, is composed of both urban and sparsely populated lands with limited federal, state, and local law enforcement presence along the border. Historically, the United States has focused attention and resources primarily on the U.S. border with Mexico, which continues to experience significantly higher levels of drug trafficking and illegal immigration than the U.S.-Canadian border.<sup>1</sup> However, DHS reports that the terrorist threat on the northern border is higher, given the large expanse of area with limited law enforcement coverage. There is also a great deal of trade and travel across this border, and while legal trade is predominant, DHS reports networks of illicit criminal activity and smuggling of drugs, currency, people, and weapons between the two countries. DHS reported spending nearly \$3 billion in its efforts to interdict and investigate illegal northern border activity in fiscal year 2010, annually making approximately 6,000 arrests and interdicting approximately 40,000 pounds of illegal drugs at and between the northern border ports of entry.<sup>2</sup>

Securing the northern border is the primary responsibility of various components within DHS, in collaboration with other federal, state, local,

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<sup>1</sup>For example, DHS data show that in fiscal year 2009, apprehensions of inadmissible aliens along the northern border were approximately 1.3 percent of apprehensions along the southwest border, and pounds of illegal narcotics seized along the northern border were about 1.6 percent of pounds seized along the southwest border.

<sup>2</sup>Ports of entry are the facilities that provide for the controlled entry into or departure from the United States for persons and materials. Specifically, a port of entry is any officially designated location (seaports, airports, or land border locations) where DHS's Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers or employees are assigned to accept entries of merchandise, clear passengers, collect duties, and enforce customs laws.

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tribal, and Canadian law enforcement agencies.<sup>3</sup> Within DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is the frontline agency responsible for interdiction of persons and contraband crossing the border illegally, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is responsible for investigating the source of cross-border crimes and dismantling illegal operations. Other federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian law enforcement agencies also have responsibilities to detect, interdict, and investigate different types of illegal activity within certain geographic boundaries. For example, the U.S. Forest Service, within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), has responsibility for the protection of natural resources and persons on Forest Service lands, including about 400 miles adjacent to the northern border. Similarly, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), within the Department of Justice (DOJ), conducts investigations of priority drug trafficking organizations, domestic and foreign, that can include drug smuggling across the border or ports of entry.

DHS has established partnerships with other federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian law enforcement agencies to secure the northern border, and taken action to improve coordination among its components and across its partners. To facilitate partnerships and coordination, DHS has established various mechanisms—such as interagency forums and agreements—to improve information sharing necessary to achieve a common understanding of the border security threats and to leverage resources for achieving an integrated law enforcement response. However, it is unclear the extent to which these efforts are addressing border security gaps, and in November 2008 we reported that DHS had not linked its initiatives to the border vulnerabilities it had identified or informed Congress about additional resources needed to secure the northern border.<sup>4</sup> DHS and GAO have also reported long-standing coordination challenges between CBP's Office of Border Patrol (Border Patrol) and ICE, ICE and DEA, and Border Patrol and Forest Service that may impede

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<sup>3</sup>Collaboration can be broadly defined as any joint activity that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when organizations act alone.

<sup>4</sup>According to our November 2008 report, DHS reported its northern border vulnerabilities, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal immigration to Congress; however its report did not include information on the extent that various DHS initiatives mitigate or eliminate such vulnerabilities. GAO, *Northern Border Security: DHS's Report Could Better Inform Congress by Identifying Actions, Resources, and Time Frames Needed to Address Vulnerabilities*, [GAO-09-93](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 25, 2008).

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achieving border security goals.<sup>5</sup> This report responds to your request to review how DHS has coordinated law enforcement resources across law enforcement partners to improve northern border security and made progress in addressing past coordination challenges. Specifically, we answered the following questions:

- According to selected northern border security partners, to what extent has DHS improved federal coordination of border security intelligence and enforcement operations with state, local, tribal, and Canadian law enforcement partners?
- To what extent has DHS made progress in addressing past coordination challenges between Border Patrol and ICE, and across DEA and Forest Service in different locations across the northern border, according to selected northern border security partners?
- What progress has DHS made in securing the northern border, and to what extent has DHS used its partnerships and coordination efforts to address DHS's reported border security vulnerabilities?

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<sup>5</sup>GAO, *Drug Control: Better Coordination with the Department of Homeland Security and an Updated Accountability Framework Can Further Enhance DEA's Efforts to Meet Post-9/11 Responsibilities*, GAO-09-63 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 20, 2009); GAO, *Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Ensure a Coordinated Federal Response to Illegal Activity on Federal Lands*, GAO-11-177 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 18, 2010). DHS, Office of Inspector General, *An Assessment of the Proposal to Merge Customs and Border Protection with Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, OIG-06-04 (Washington, D.C., November 2005); DHS, Office of Inspector General, *DHS' Progress in Addressing Coordination Challenges Between Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, OIG-07-38 (Washington, D.C., Apr. 13, 2007).



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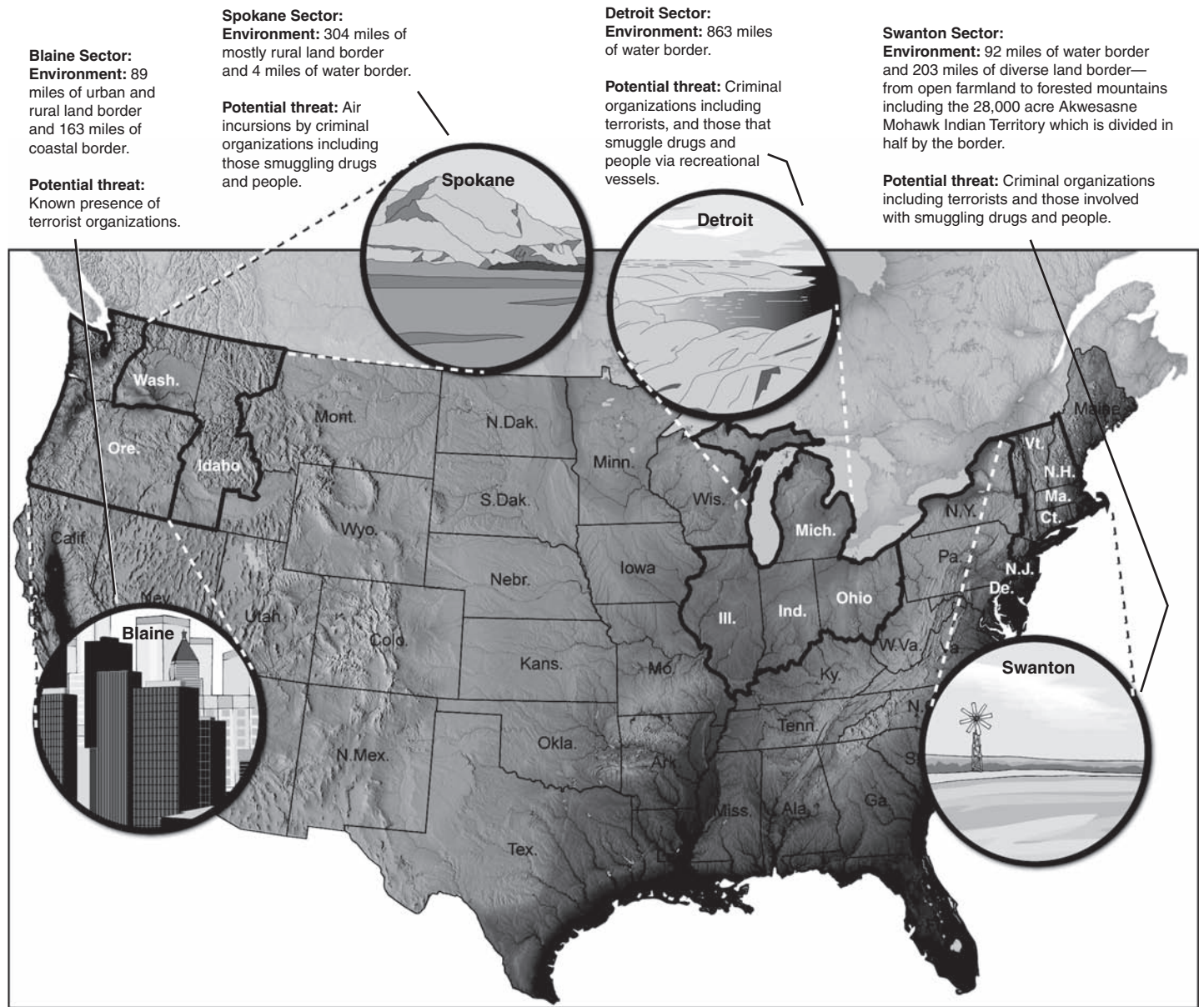
## Scope and Methodology

In conducting our work, we interviewed headquarters officials at DHS, DOJ, the Department of the Interior (DOI), and USDA; analyzed DHS documentation; and conducted site visits to four northern border locations. We selected Border Patrol's Blaine, Spokane, Detroit, and Swanton sectors to visit as they comprise a mix of differences along the northern border regarding geography (western, central, and eastern border areas), threats (terrorism, drug smuggling, and illegal migration), and threat environment (air, marine, land) as shown in figure 1.<sup>6</sup> We conducted interviews with federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian officials relevant to these Border Patrol sectors. Although other northern border partners do not divide their geographic areas of responsibility by sectors, for the purposes of this report, we refer to the northern border partners—such as ICE and DEA—whose area of responsibility overlaps with these sectors as officials operating within these Border Patrol sectors. While we cannot generalize our work from these visits to all locations along the northern border, the information we obtained provides examples of the way in which DHS and other federal agencies coordinate their efforts with these northern border partners.

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<sup>6</sup>In total, there are eight Border Patrol Sectors that encompass the 13 northern border states. They are, from west to east, Blaine, Spokane, Havre, Grand Forks, Detroit, Buffalo, Swanton, and Houlton.

**Figure 1: Description of Northern Border Patrol Sectors in Our Review**



Source: GAO analysis of Border Patrol's data; and Art Explosion (clip art).

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To address the first objective, we reviewed documents that included relevant legislation affecting the northern border,<sup>7</sup> a past report to Congress in response to legislated requirements,<sup>8</sup> and agency strategies, including the DHS Quadrennial Homeland Security Review,<sup>9</sup> and CBP's Northern Border Strategy.<sup>10</sup> We interviewed DHS headquarters officials with knowledge of DHS coordination efforts and also interviewed federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian officials in the four sectors we visited to obtain their perspective on DHS coordination efforts focusing on their participation in interagency forums and joint operations.<sup>11</sup> For a complete list of northern border partners we interviewed in each sector, see appendix I. Based on these documents and discussions, we focused on two interagency forums—the Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET) and the Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST)—and joint operations such as the Shiprider Program. Our assessment of these interagency forums and joint operations are nongeneralizable as they do not include an exhaustive list of U.S. and Canadian initiatives to coordinate the security of the border. However, they were highlighted by the officials we interviewed as interagency forums that helped to coordinate information sharing, interdiction, and investigations across nations and levels of government along with joint operations that coordinated a federal law enforcement response between the partners in the air, land, and marine border environments. In addition to these discussions within each sector, we reviewed documents at the sector level relevant to northern border coordination including meeting minutes from interagency meetings and after-action reports for joint operations. We

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<sup>7</sup>Legislation we reviewed included the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, Pub. L. No. 110-53, 121 Stat. 266, and the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-296, 116 Stat. 2135.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Report to Congress on Ongoing DHS Initiatives to Improve Security along the U.S. Northern Border* (Washington, D.C., Feb. 29, 2008).

<sup>9</sup>According to DHS, the Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report (QHRS) outlines the strategies for guiding the activities of homeland security partners toward a common end. These partners are defined by DHS as the homeland security enterprise to include the collective efforts and shared responsibilities of federal, state, local, and tribal partners, among others, to maintain public safety. DHS, *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report: A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland* (Washington, D.C., February 2010).

<sup>10</sup>DHS, *CBP Northern Border Strategy* (Washington, D.C., August 2009).

<sup>11</sup>Those with whom we met at DHS headquarters included the Office of the Inspector General, and the offices of International Affairs, Strategic Plans, Program Analysis and Evaluation, Operations Coordination and Planning, Intelligence and Analysis, CBP, and ICE.

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compared DHS coordination efforts to best practices and federal guidelines for interagency coordination to determine whether DHS's efforts are consistent with such practices.<sup>12</sup>

To address the second objective, we reviewed agreements established between DHS components, between DHS and DOJ, and between DHS and USDA to coordinate interdiction and investigation activities, and interviewed officials from these agencies at headquarters and in the field. Specifically, we reviewed agreements assigning responsibilities for interdiction and investigation between Border Patrol and ICE, Border Patrol and Forest Service, and ICE and DEA. We reviewed documents and reports documenting coordination challenges between these agencies, including those prepared by DHS and us, and subsequent corrective action cited by the departments. As part of our interviews with officials in the four sectors we visited, we examined the extent to which DHS and its partners stated that agreements were working to overcome coordination challenges between agencies and were enhancing the sharing of information and resources to secure the border. See appendix I for a list of offices interviewed in the four sectors. We also used work from our companion review of border coordination on federal lands, to assess Border Patrol coordination with DOI and the USDA in the Spokane Sector.<sup>13</sup>

To address the third objective, we analyzed Border Patrol's 2007 through 2010 Operational Requirements Based Budget Process (ORBBP) documents that include each sector's assessment of the border security threat, operational assessment of border security, and resource

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<sup>12</sup>DHS and DOJ, *Fusion Center Guidelines: Developing and Sharing Information and Intelligence in a New Era—Guidelines for Establishing and Operating Fusion Centers at the Local, State, and Federal Levels* (Washington, D.C., August 2006). DHS, *Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and Memoranda of Agreement (MOA)* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 24, 2003). GAO, *Information Sharing: Federal Agencies Are Sharing Border and Terrorism Information with Local and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies, but Additional Efforts Are Needed*, [GAO-10-41](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2009); GAO, *Interagency Collaboration: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight of National Security Strategies, Organizations, Workforce, and Information Sharing*, [GAO-09-904SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 25, 2009); and GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

<sup>13</sup>[GAO-11-177](#).

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requirements needed to further secure border miles within each sector.<sup>14</sup> We reviewed these documents to determine the number of border miles that Border Patrol reported were under effective control, the number of miles reported as needing outside law enforcement support, and the extent that use of partner resources were being used to address gaps in Border Patrol resources. We reviewed guidance headquarters provided to sectors for development of the ORBBP, as well as direction and performance indicators provided in CBP's Northern Border Strategy.<sup>15</sup> We also interviewed Border Patrol officials in the field who are responsible for preparing the ORBBP and headquarters officials responsible for reviewing these documents.

We conducted this performance audit from December 2009 through December 2010 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

CBP has reported many threats on and vulnerabilities of the northern border related to illegal cross-border activity. Overall, according to CBP, a transportation infrastructure exists across much of the northern border that facilitates ease of access to, and egress from, the border area. CBP also reports that the maritime border on the Great Lakes and rivers is vulnerable to use of small vessels as a conduit for potential exploitation by terrorists, alien smuggling, trafficking of illicit drugs and other contraband and criminal activity. Also, the northern border's waterways can freeze during the winter and can easily be crossed on foot or by vehicle or snowmobile. The northern air border is also vulnerable to low-flying aircraft that, for example, smuggle drugs by entering U.S. airspace from Canada. Additionally, CBP reports that further northern border threats result from the fact that the northern border is exploited by well-organized

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<sup>14</sup>The ORBBP is Border Patrol's standardized national planning process that links sector- and station-level planning, operations, and budgets. This process documents how sectors identify and justify their requests to achieve effective control of the border in their area of responsibility, and enables Border Patrol to determine how the deployment of resources, such as technology, infrastructure, and personnel, can be used to secure the border.

<sup>15</sup>DHS, *CBP Northern Border Strategy*.

smuggling operations, which can potentially support the movement of terrorists and their weapons.

**Federal, State, Local, Tribal, and Canadian Law Enforcement Partners on the Northern Border**

Northern border security is the primary responsibility of three DHS components—CBP, ICE, and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)—which reported spending more than \$2.9 billion in efforts to secure the northern border in 2010. Table 1 shows the roles and responsibilities of DHS components regarding northern border security.

**Table 1: Department of Homeland Security Components with a Primary Mission to Secure the Northern Border**

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components	Role and responsibility on the northern border	Fiscal year 2010 northern border budget (dollars in millions)
CBP	As the lead federal component agency in charge of securing U.S. borders, CBP comprises various offices with roles in northern border security including the Office of Border Patrol (Border Patrol), which is responsible for detecting, interdicting, and apprehending those who attempt to illegally enter or smuggle any person or contraband across U.S. borders between the ports of entry. <sup>a</sup>	\$1,190
ICE	As the largest investigative arm within DHS, ICE comprises numerous offices including Homeland Security Investigations, which is responsible for investigating cross-border illegal activity and criminal organizations that transport persons and goods across the border illegally.	716
USCG	USCG executes its maritime security mission on and over the major waterways, including the Great Lakes, using marine and air assets.	995
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$2,901</b>

Source: GAO analysis of DHS data.

<sup>a</sup>In addition to Border Patrol, CBP also consists of the Office of Field Operations that is responsible for preventing terrorists, terrorist weapons, inadmissible aliens, smugglers, narcotics, and other contraband from entering the United States while facilitating legitimate trade and travel, at the nation's air, land, and sea ports of entry; and the Office of Air and Marine that is responsible for operating integrated air and marine forces to detect, interdict, and prevent acts of terrorism and the unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs, and other contraband toward or across U.S. borders.

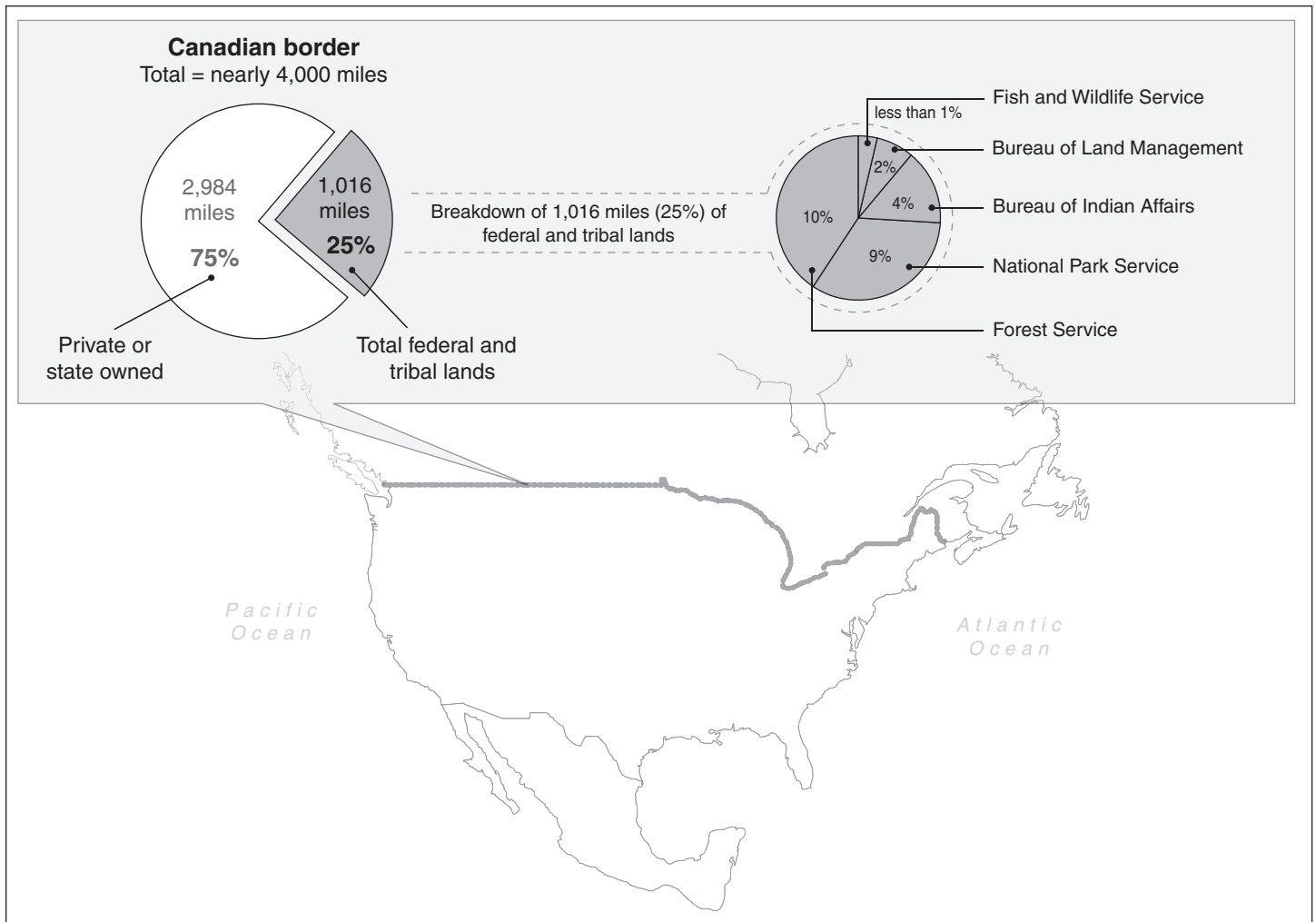
CBP and ICE have several partners that are also involved in northern border security efforts. These partners include other U.S. federal agencies such as DOJ's DEA, which has responsibility for drug enforcement, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which has responsibility for combating terrorism. The Department of Defense (DOD), while not a partner, also provides support as requested, such as personnel and technology for temporary joint operations. Partners also include Canadian law enforcement agencies such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)—which is responsible for national law enforcement, including

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border security—and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), which is responsible for border security and public safety at the ports of entry.

CBP and ICE also partner with federal, state, local, and tribal entities that have law enforcement jurisdiction for federal, public, private, or tribal lands that are adjacent to the border. As shown in figure 2, federal lands comprise about 1,016 miles, or approximately 25 percent, of the nearly 4,000 northern border miles (excluding the Alaska–Canada border), and are primarily administered by the National Park Service and Forest Service. Law enforcement personnel from sovereign Indian nations located on about 4 percent of the northern border also conduct law enforcement operations related to border security. In addition, DOI’s Bureau of Indian Affairs may enforce federal laws on Indian lands, with the consent of tribes and in accordance with tribal laws. Moreover, numerous state and local law enforcement entities interdict and investigate criminal activity on public and private lands adjacent to about 75 percent of the northern border. Although these agencies are not responsible for preventing the illegal entry of aliens into the United States, they do employ law enforcement officers and investigators to protect the public and natural resources on their lands.

**Figure 2: Federal and Tribal Lands along the Canadian Border, by Administering Agency**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of the Interior and Forest Service data.

Overlap exists in mission and operational boundaries among agencies at the border that require coordination and collaboration for efficient and effective law enforcement. One reason for overlap is Border Patrol's multilayered strategy for securing the border, which provides for several layers of agents who operate not only at the border, but also on public and private lands up to 100 miles from the border. As a result, officials from other federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies may patrol in the same geographic area and pursue the same persons or criminal



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organizations who violate laws underpinning each agency's respective mission. Another reason for overlap is that agencies have separate responsibility for investigating crimes that are conducted by the same criminals or organizations.

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## DHS Vision for Integrated Homeland Security

Federal legislation and DHS policy have stressed the need for coordination between DHS components and across other federal agencies and partners to most efficiently and effectively secure the homeland and its borders. The 9/11 Commission had determined that limited coordination had contributed to border security vulnerabilities.<sup>16</sup> In addition, coordination challenges were also addressed in several GAO and DHS reports. For example, in both 2004 and 2010, we reported that Border Patrol, USDA, and DOI were challenged to coordinate border security efforts on northern federal lands.<sup>17</sup> We also reported in early 2009 that there were significant challenges to coordination of drug law enforcement efforts between ICE and DEA.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the DHS Inspector General issued reports on coordination challenges between Border Patrol and ICE in 2005 and 2007, citing the shortfalls in information sharing and operational coordination that have led to competition, interference, and operational inflexibility.<sup>19</sup>

The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act required the Secretary of Homeland Security to report to Congress on ongoing initiatives to improve security along the northern border as well as recommendations to address vulnerabilities along the northern border.<sup>20</sup> As DHS reported in response to this requirement, the agency has taken action to establish or support interagency forums and joint operations among agencies to strengthen information sharing and coordinate efforts to secure the border. DHS reiterated its commitment to share information across agencies in its 2008 Information Sharing Strategy, which provides full recognition and integration of federal agencies, tribal nations, and

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<sup>16</sup>National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Washington, D.C., July 22, 2004).

<sup>17</sup>GAO, *Border Security: Agencies Need to Better Coordinate Their Strategies and Operations on Federal Lands*, [GAO-04-590](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 16, 2004), and [GAO-11-177](#).

<sup>18</sup>[GAO-09-63](#).

<sup>19</sup>DHS OIG-06-04, and OIG-07-38.

<sup>20</sup>Pub. L. No. 110-53, § 731(a)-(b), 121 Stat. 266, 351 (2007).

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others in the DHS information-sharing environment and in development of relevant technologies.<sup>21</sup> Also, in its 2008 Report to Congress on the status of northern border security, DHS listed interagency forums and joint operations that it established or supports for coordinating efforts among federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian partners.<sup>22</sup> DHS, along with its federal partners, also issued updates and addendums to long-standing memorandums of agreement (MOA) or understanding (MOU) between its components and across federal agencies on respective roles and responsibilities to enhance coordination.

Most recently, DHS outlined its vision for coordination among agencies and partners for a united homeland security enterprise in its Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report (QHSR), submitted to Congress in February 2010.<sup>23</sup> Cited as a strategic framework for homeland security, the QHSR is to guide the activities of participants in homeland security toward a common end. In this regard, it emphasizes a need for joint actions and efforts across previously discrete elements of government and society including federal, state, local, tribal, and international entities, among others, to achieve core homeland security mission areas, including securing and managing the borders by effectively controlling U.S. air, land, and sea domains, and safeguarding lawful trade and travel, and disrupting and dismantling transnational criminal organizations. The efforts supporting the QHSR include a review to identify mission overlap among components. In accordance with the QHSR vision, DHS is also developing a northern border strategic plan to clarify roles and responsibilities among all law enforcement partners. According to DHS officials, the strategic plan is in its final stages of review but time frames for completion have not been solidified.

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## DHS Border Security Goals and Assessments

DHS has established performance goals and measures for border control. The CBP performance measure for effective border control is defined as the number of border miles where Border Patrol has reasonable assurance that illegal entries are detected, identified, and classified, and Border

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<sup>21</sup>DHS, *Department of Homeland Security Information Sharing Strategy* (Washington, D.C., Apr. 18, 2008).

<sup>22</sup>DHS's U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Report to Congress on Ongoing DHS Initiatives to Improve Security along the U.S. Northern Border* (Washington, D.C., Feb. 29, 2008).

<sup>23</sup>DHS, *Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report*.

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Patrol has the ability to respond and bring these incidents to a satisfactory law enforcement resolution. DHS reports this performance goal and measure for border security to the public and to Congress in the DHS Annual Performance Report.

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## DHS Used Interagency Forums and Joint Operations to Improve Border Security Coordination, but DHS Oversight Could Address Emerging Challenges

DHS used interagency forums and joint operations to improve federal coordination of northern border security efforts with law enforcement partners from state, local, and tribal governments, and Canada according to officials we interviewed across four northern border sectors. However, numerous partners cited challenges related to the inability to resource the increasing number of interagency forums in their area and raised concerns that some efforts were overlapping. DHS oversight of interagency forums established by its components across locations may help address these challenges and ensure continued benefit of DHS efforts to increase the national capacity of its partners to secure the northern border.

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## Interagency Forums Improved Binational Coordination of Northern Border Intelligence Information, Resources, and Operations

Interagency forums improved coordination of border intelligence information, resources, and operations between U.S. federal agencies and their law enforcement partners in Canada, according to the majority of the representatives of these entities we interviewed across four northern border sectors. The 9/11 Commission had determined that limited coordination had contributed to border security vulnerabilities, and emphasized the importance of establishing or supporting interagency forums to strengthen information sharing and coordinate efforts to secure the border. Two DHS components, CBP and ICE, responsible for border security interdiction and investigations, respectively, played key roles in the establishment of the two interagency forums within our review—the IBET and BEST—and along with USCG and Canada’s RCMP and CBSA are key participants in both forums. Information about these interagency forums is presented in table 2.

**Table 2: DHS-Sponsored Interagency Forums That Coordinate Northern Border Security Information, Resources, and Operations among U.S. Federal, Canadian, and Other Law Enforcement Partners**

Interagency forums	Purpose and structure	Number	Partners involved
Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET)	Permanent binational forums established through a charter that outlines partners' responsibilities for sharing border security information and coordinating cross-border law enforcement and antiterrorism efforts between the ports of entry. Although IBET members are not required to be colocated, they make up various teams and committees that meet on a quarterly or monthly basis or as often as necessary to exchange pertinent information and, at times, facilitate joint operations that bring together federal, state, local, and Canadian resources.	There have been 15 IBET regions with 24 individual IBET units established across the northern border since 1996.	Core agencies: Canada's RCMP and CBSA, CBP's Border Patrol, ICE, USCG  Other stakeholders involved: federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian law enforcement agencies including, but not limited to, Canadian provincial police, and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Police.
Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST)	Permanent binational forums developed and facilitated by ICE to enhance border security, investigate transnational smuggling organizations, and combat violence related to smuggling occurring at the nation's borders through coordinated, colocated efforts.	Three BESTs have been established on the northern border since 2008.	DHS components include ICE, Intelligence and Analysis, CBP, and USCG. Also included are DEA, CBSA, and the RCMP, along with other key federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies including, but not limited to, the FBI, and the Ontario Provincial Police.

Source: DHS and RCMP.

DHS is working to establish a means to quantify and report on the benefits achieved through its investment in interagency forums, but in the meantime officials from 17 offices that participate in interagency forums across the four sectors we visited commented that interagency forums had improved coordination among the participants.<sup>24</sup> These officials provided examples that highlighted benefits in three key areas: (1) facilitating the sharing of border security intelligence information, (2) facilitating the sharing of resources such as equipment and personnel; and in some cases, (3) serving as a tool for deconfliction—or a means to inform partners of special border security operations that were planned to be conducted in

<sup>24</sup>Officials in the 18 offices interviewed included those from 4 Border Patrol and 4 ICE offices representing the four sectors in our study, 2 USCG offices operating within the Blaine and Detroit sectors, 2 DEA offices operating within the Blaine and Detroit sectors, as well as 3 RCMP and 3 CBSA offices north of the Blaine, Detroit, and Swanton sectors. RCMP and CBSA officials north of the Spokane sector are the same officials north of the Blaine sector.

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geographic areas of responsibility common to multiple law enforcement agencies.

**Information Sharing.** The IBET or the BEST facilitated exchange of timely and actionable threat information between U.S. and Canadian partners leading to improved interdiction and investigation capabilities, according to officials from 17 of the 18 offices we interviewed.<sup>25</sup> For example, IBET participation helped to build trust between the core partners, which resulted in collaborative efforts to secure the border, according to Canadian CBSA officials from Windsor and Montreal—north of the Detroit and Swanton sectors respectively. In addition, IBET membership further strengthened U.S. and Canadian relationships as participants interacted more frequently through meetings and the colocation of personnel, which in turn facilitated the exchange of information according to ICE and Border Patrol officials operating within the Swanton and Detroit sectors, respectively. As a result, we were told IBET partners can more easily and quickly obtain information, such as border entry and exit data and surveillance images that would normally take several weeks to obtain. For example, Canada’s CBSA forwarded intelligence on a Canadian national who was smuggling drugs from Canada to the United States to the BEST, according to ICE officials operating within the Blaine sector, at which time BEST partners—Border Patrol and ICE—were able to conduct surveillance and apprehend the individual, seizing over 500 pounds of marijuana that was backpacked across the border, and gain further intelligence about other criminal activity.

**Sharing of Resources.** The IBET or BEST helped partners leverage personnel, technology, and other resources for operations to interdict or investigate cross-border illegal activity, according to officials in 17 of the 18 offices we interviewed.<sup>26</sup> For example, colocation of BEST members provides U.S. and Canadian officials ready access to the knowledge and skills of participating agencies, according to ICE officials operating within the Detroit sector. Another example of a benefit is the pooling of

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<sup>25</sup>An official from RCMP north of the Detroit sector reported that information sharing through the IBET and BEST in the Detroit sector was limited by the reluctance of some participating agencies to share proprietary information with their partners, which has affected the quality of intelligence produced by the forums.

<sup>26</sup>ICE officials operating within the Swanton sector stated that the IBETs in their area of responsibility did not increase the sharing of resources among participants, but such coordination was not needed as these IBETs did not conduct operations.

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resources. The IBET operating within the Spokane sector maintains a centralized resource list that participants can view and request use of partners' available technology, equipment, and vehicles, according to ICE and Border Patrol officials. Radio communications are also facilitated among participants of the IBET and BEST attended by officials from the Blaine sector, in that all participants have access to a bank of 10 hand-held radios on the same frequency, according to an ICE official operating within the Blaine sector. Officials cited examples of how sharing personnel and resources helped secure the border. In one example, U.S. and Canadian IBET partners were conducting joint operations to monitor over 133 kilometers of unguarded roads in the Swanton sector that were exploited by criminal organizations smuggling humans, drugs, and other contraband, according to RCMP officials north of the Swanton sector. The operation employed Canadian personnel from RCMP and Border Patrol to patrol the roads using resources such as motion sensor and video equipment to expand surveillance coverage. U.S. and Canadian IBET partners also shared sensor hits and video footage from both sides of the border. As a result of the shared information and resources, partners were able to determine if illegal activities were going north or south of the border and had increased awareness to detect and interdict cross-border crime.

**Deconfliction.** The IBET or BEST were also used in conjunction with other interagency forums to deconflict operations planned by various agencies that operate in geographic areas of responsibility common to multiple law enforcement agencies, according to officials in all offices we interviewed.<sup>27</sup> For example, the colocation of BEST members raised awareness of operations and activities at the border due to the daily and ongoing information being shared between members, according to ICE participants in the Blaine and Detroit sectors. IBET participants from the Spokane sector also had daily telephone conversations to discuss their operations, and subgroups within the IBET met once a week to share information and intelligence and discuss operations to prevent

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<sup>27</sup>Deconfliction is important in areas of overlapping responsibility to prevent law enforcement agencies from unknowingly disrupting operations of other law enforcement agencies, and to prevent accidental shootings of law enforcement agents conducting covert operations. A DOJ report assessing border security threats on tribal lands cited the importance of deconfliction for the Akwesasne reservation in the Swanton Sector, which has more than six federal, state, local, or tribal law enforcement agencies operating within its borders. National Drug Intelligence Center, DOJ, *Cross Border Drug Trafficking Through Indian Country* (Washington, D.C., August 2009).

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unknowingly interrupting each other, according to a Border Patrol participant.<sup>28</sup>

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### Joint Operations Improved Binational Coordination to Provide an Integrated Law Enforcement Response

DHS components also used joint operations as a means to integrate federal border security efforts with northern border partners from state and local governments, tribal nations, and Canada. The 9/11 Commission stressed the importance of extensive collaboration with international partners as well as increasing interaction between federal, state, and local law enforcement through joint efforts that would combine intelligence, manpower, and operations to address national security vulnerabilities. Individually, partners had insufficient authority, staff, or assets to conduct certain types of operations, according to Border Patrol officials in the Detroit sector, and joint operations allowed partners to leverage these resources to address existing border security vulnerabilities. For example, to address vulnerabilities related to different law enforcement authority across the border, the United States and Canada established binational agreements that allowed USCG and RCMP law enforcement personnel under the Shiprider Program to conduct joint vessel patrols in the Blaine and Detroit sectors that leveraged both U.S. and Canadian authority across the maritime border. To address vulnerabilities related to insufficient staff and resources, DHS issued 3-year grants to tribal nations and state and local governments under Operation Stonegarden to augment Border Patrol personnel and resources for patrolling the land border, which benefited all four sectors we visited. DHS components also developed joint operations for conducting time-limited surge operations for interdiction or investigations in the air, maritime, or land border environments, including Operations Channel Watch, Outlook, and Frozen Timber.

DHS tracked the resulting benefits of these joint operations in their after-action reports as reflected in table 3, and all officials from 20 offices who participated in one or more of these operations across the four sectors we visited agreed that joint operations made important contributions to

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<sup>28</sup>Other interagency forums—such as the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program, an interagency forum sponsored by the Office of National Drug Control Policy—were also used for deconfliction in the Blaine, Detroit, Spokane, and Swanton sectors. For example, USCG officials in the Detroit sector stated that it used the HIDTA to deconflict law enforcement operations with law enforcement agencies who are not involved in the IBET such as the FBI. (The HIDTA program is a federally funded program that brings together federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies into task forces that conduct investigations of drug trafficking organizations engaged in illegal drug production, manufacturing, importation, or distribution.)

border security.<sup>29</sup> These contributions included an enhanced ability under Operation Outlook to detect cross-border illegal activity and to inform future asset deployments in Spokane sector, a show of force under Operation Channel Watch to deter illegal cross-border activity in Detroit sector, and across all operations the arrest of smugglers and other criminals crossing the border, or seizures of narcotics, cigarettes, currency, and other contraband.

**Table 3: Joint Operations Highlighted by Northern Border Partners to Coordinate Northern Border Security Efforts**

Joint operation	Purpose	Benefits	Partners involved
Shiprider Program	Binational operation launched in 2005 and conducted under agreement between the United States and Canada that allows law enforcement personnel from both countries to conduct joint vessel patrols to prevent, detect, and investigate criminal offenses in shared waterways. <sup>a</sup>	Coordinated response leveraging equipment and personnel with partners to address marine threats in shared waterways. During the 2-month pilot operation on the St. Lawrence River in 2007, the Shiprider program resulted in the boarding of over 187 vessels, and seizure of 214 pounds of marijuana, over 1 million contraband cigarettes, 6 vessels, and C\$38,000 intended to fund smuggling activities. Gathered intelligence for shore based investigations.	DHS primary component is USCG. Canadian primary component is RCMP.
Operation Channel Watch	Binational joint training and surge operation launched in 2007 and conducted annually for vessel and aircraft patrols and inspections along the Great Lakes. The duration of the exercise varies from year to year; in 2009, the Operation lasted 7 days. In 2010, the operation was expanded to exercises conducted on six different weekends during the summer.	Coordinated response leveraging funds, equipment, and personnel with partners to address marine threats on the Great Lakes. The 2009 operation involved 16 partners and resulted in 350 vessel boardings, 13 warnings, 29 violations, and 3 arrests or detentions.	DHS components include USCG, CBP's Border Patrol, and ICE. DOJ component is DEA. State and local law enforcement agencies include among others the Michigan State Police. Canadian components include among others RCMP.

<sup>29</sup>Officials we interviewed include: (1) Blaine sector—Border Patrol, ICE, USCG, Washington State Patrol, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, and RCMP; (2) Spokane sector—Border Patrol, ICE, Forest Service, and Okanogan County Sheriff; (3) Detroit sector—Border Patrol, ICE, USCG, Michigan State Police, Detroit Police, and RCMP; and (4) Swanton sector—Border Patrol, New York State Police, Rouses Point Police, and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Police.



<b>Joint operation</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Partners involved</b>
Operation Outlook	Border Patrol led series of interdiction operations in the Blaine and Spokane sectors between 2005 and 2008 targeting the identification and interdiction of illicit cross-border traffic.	Facilitated increased information sharing and a better understanding of partner capabilities. In 2007, the operation in the Blaine sector resulted in the interdiction of eight illegal aliens attempting to cross into the United States by boat and the seizure of approximately 80 pounds of the illicit drug Ecstasy.	DHS components include Border Patrol and ICE. Others involved included DOD and state and local law enforcement entities.
Operation Frozen Timber	ICE led investigation involving DHS, DOI, and USDA components to address drug smuggling in the national forests and parklands along the United States–Canada border.	Facilitated relationships between partners and promoted information sharing. In 2004, the operation resulted in the seizure of approximately 8,000 pounds of marijuana, 800 pounds of cocaine, 3 aircraft, and \$1.5 million in U.S. currency.	DHS components include CBP's Office of Border Patrol and ICE. DOI component is the National Park Service. USDA component is the U.S. Forest Service.
Operation Stonegarden	Federal grants provided to state, local, and tribal partners to fund overtime pay and equipment used to augment Border Patrol operations on the northern and southern borders.	Facilitated relationships and the coordination of information sharing and resources. For example, in the Blaine and Spokane sectors, between October 2009 and July 2010, roughly 1,396 days were dedicated to Stonegarden, which led to 287 arrests and 5,535 vehicle stops. <sup>b</sup>	DHS components include CBP's Border Patrol. State and local law enforcement include New York State Police and Whatcom County Sheriff's Office. Tribal law enforcement from the Akwesasne Indian Reservation.

Source: DHS and RCMP.

<sup>a</sup>Shiprider operations are currently being deployed on a short-term basis as partners await the Canadian ratification of the long-term, bilateral agreement that will make the operation permanent.

<sup>b</sup>Data provided by DHS on Operation Stonegarden are generated from state and local law enforcement agencies, and DHS has not validated the results of these data.

Officials in 5 of the 20 offices raised concerns that, while surge operations provided short-term benefits, they may not provide an ongoing deterrent effect or address long-standing border security vulnerabilities. For example, Border Patrol officials in the Spokane sector said that while Operation Frozen Timber was a successful joint operation that resulted in significant arrests and drug seizures, it was not an ongoing effort, and in their opinion, should be expanded to a more comprehensive concept of operations to combat and deter cross-border smuggling by air. Likewise, ICE officials operating within the Detroit sector stated that Operation Channel Watch demonstrated a show of force on the Great Lakes, but it was not clear whether conducting this joint operation six weekends a year

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would deter sophisticated criminal organizations.<sup>30</sup> Despite these concerns, after-action reports showed that these time-limited joint operations had provided some lasting benefits. Operation Outlook, for example, resulted in information about the continuous and significant threat of cross-border smuggling in the air environment in the Spokane sector, and pointed out weaknesses that could be corrected in the placement and use of air and ground assets.

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### DHS Oversight of Interagency Forum Missions and Locations Could Help Ensure Efficient Coordination of Partner Resources

Most northern border partners we interviewed across the four sectors cited challenges to resourcing the increasing number of interagency forums being established in their geographic area of responsibility. An interagency working group convened in 2009 to study the interaction between the IBET and BEST also raised concerns that the increasing demand to participate in interagency forums created difficulties in gathering the resources necessary to participate in the IBET or BEST.<sup>31</sup> Overall, officials in 21 of the 30 Canadian, U.S. federal, state, and local offices across the four sectors we visited said that it was difficult to resource the IBET and BEST, in addition to other interagency forums in their geographic area.<sup>32</sup>

- A CBSA official north of the Swanton sector stated that the office must balance resources among the three IBET offices within its area of responsibility and that it could not afford to staff a BEST office with current resources if one were to open in the area.
- ICE officials operating within the Swanton sector stated that there are two IBETs in their area of responsibility, and while they only have resources to staff the closest one to their office, they would like to staff

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<sup>30</sup>USCG officials operating within the Detroit sector reported that the ultimate goal is to expand the Channel Watch concept to occur on a daily basis to strengthen border security benefits once funds and resources are available.

<sup>31</sup>Representatives from the five core IBET agencies and DOJ constituted the IBET/BEST working group, including Canada's RCMP and CBSA, and U.S. federal agencies including Border Patrol, ICE, USCG, and DOJ. The findings of this working group were published in a final report. DHS, *IBET/BEST Interaction Final Report* (Washington, D.C., April 2009).

<sup>32</sup>Officials we interviewed included: (1) Blaine sector—Border Patrol, ICE, USCG, FBI, DEA, Washington State Patrol, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office, RCMP, and CBSA; (2) Spokane sector—Border Patrol, ICE, FBI, National Park Service, and Okanogan County Sheriff; (3) Detroit sector—Border Patrol, ICE, USCG, DEA, FBI, Michigan State Police, Detroit Police, RCMP, and CBSA; and (4) Swanton sector—Border Patrol, ICE, FBI, New York State Police, Rouses Point Police, RCMP, and CBSA.

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the IBET further away as it is close to a port of entry and has more law enforcement partners that can further the ICE mission.

- Local law enforcement in the Swanton sector, Rouses Point Police Department, reported that the high level of commitment required by forums such as the IBET make it difficult for resource-strapped smaller law enforcement agencies such as their own to participate.

Officials from seven of the nine remaining offices without these concerns included Border Patrol in the Blaine, Detroit, and Swanton sectors and ICE operating within the Blaine sector, who said they had sufficient resources, and local law enforcement in the Detroit sector who said they would not assign staff to a forum unless it was the most efficient use of the officer's time. In addition, an FBI official operating within the Spokane sector and an official from the Michigan State Police said that while the number of forums has increased since 9/11, only those that provide the most value through focused meetings and attract the most participants will continue to exist.

Of the officials within the 13 offices operating within the Blaine and Detroit sectors who were named as key members of the IBET or BEST, more than half cited concerns about mission overlap between the IBET and BEST that could result in duplication of effort,<sup>33</sup> a concern also expressed by the DHS Inspector General in a 2007 report,<sup>34</sup> and members of the IBET/BEST Working Group.<sup>35</sup> ICE headquarters officials stated that although there are not distinct geographic boundaries of operation for the IBET and BEST, ICE is addressing concerns of overlapping operations by developing a strategic plan to lay out the concept of operations, administrative policies and procedures, and the goals of the BEST. At the time of our review, ICE had not yet established a time frame for

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<sup>33</sup>A National Park Service official operating within Spokane sector also cited concerns about mission overlap of the IBET and BEST with other interagency forums. For example, the official questioned the purpose of having both the IBET and Project Northstar—another binational interagency forum—in the same sector.

<sup>34</sup>In its April 2007 report, the Inspector General reported that it was not clear how a BEST would operate differently from IBETs, which jointly investigate cross-border criminal and terrorist activity along the U.S.-Canadian border, and that care should be taken to avoid duplication of efforts with IBETs on the northern border. DHS, Office of Inspector General, *DHS's Progress in Addressing Coordination Challenges Between Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement*.

<sup>35</sup>The IBET/BEST Working Group noted during its January 29, 2009, meeting to discuss the IBET/BEST Interaction Report that IBET and BEST roles and responsibilities needed clarification and that a framework was necessary for their interaction and collaboration.

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completion of these efforts as they are in early stages of drafting the plan. In the meantime, however, officials in 7 of the 13 offices in these forums located in the Blaine and Detroit sectors were concerned that some BEST activities to investigate and interdict cross-border illegal activity at the ports of entry duplicated IBET efforts to conduct these same activities between the ports of entry.

- Border Patrol officials in the Blaine sector said that despite good working relationships between the IBET and BEST, concerns remain about overlapping cases because of the ability for cases at the ports of entry to expand into areas between the ports of entry. Likewise, ICE officials operating within the Blaine sector agreed that BEST investigative activity between the ports of entry would be duplicative of the IBET mission, but disagreed that such overlap had occurred.
- RCMP officials north of the Detroit sector reported that there is a perception of duplication because the BEST in Detroit is expanding its scope to include investigations between the ports of entry, which is the domain of the IBET. ICE officials operating within the Detroit sector said they disagreed with the assumption that a geographic dividing line could be drawn in conducting investigations. Border Patrol and DEA officials operating within the Detroit sector said that the reason for establishing the BEST in their area was unclear. In addition, Border Patrol officials stated that the IBET serves as their primary forum for targeting cross-border crime. However, ICE said that while the BEST in Detroit is a new effort, started in 2009, it provided them with better support to meet the needs of their mission. This support was provided through partnerships and colocation with federal and state and local law enforcement that are not core members of the IBET including the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the local police department.

While DHS headquarters officials report that policies governing DHS's coordination efforts are under development, DHS does not currently provide guidance or oversight to its components to establish or assess the results of interagency forums across northern border locations, according to officials from the DHS Office of Strategic Plans. We previously reported that federal agencies can enhance and sustain their collaborative efforts by, in part, developing mechanisms to monitor their results.<sup>36</sup> DHS and DOJ have developed guidance and provided oversight to help prevent overlap among interagency forums established under state and local

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<sup>36</sup> [GAO-06-15](#).

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fusion center programs, to leverage fusion centers that already exist, and to reduce the downstream burden on state and local partners that have limited resources.<sup>37</sup> However, DHS officials from the Office of Strategic Plans said that coordination policies are still in development and that many organizations within DHS share responsibility for ensuring that component operations strategically align with the Secretary's goals and commitment for efficient operation and integration of partner efforts for the homeland security mission. These officials stated that headquarters organizations, including the Management Directorate, the Office of Policy, and the Office of Operations Coordination and Planning, are developing processes to provide department-level coordination and oversight of those forums; however, DHS has not provided documentation to support its plans, thus the scope and the time frames for finalizing this effort are unclear. Ongoing DHS oversight of the mission and location of interagency forums established by its components could help prevent duplication of efforts, and help ensure that DHS is a mindful steward in conserving the scarce resources of northern border partners. Moreover, this oversight role could provide opportunities for DHS to determine whether additional forums are necessary or whether existing forums can be modified to address emerging needs.

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<sup>37</sup>State and local fusion centers are permanent collaborative efforts of two or more agencies with collocated staff and documented guidelines for establishing resources, expertise, and information at the center with the goal of maximizing its ability to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity. DOJ and DHS guidelines exist to prevent overlap among state and local fusion centers, ensure that DHS, DOJ, and the states are cognizant of existing fusion centers and those currently under development, and leverage those that already exist. DHS and DOJ, Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative, *Fusion Center Guidelines, Developing and Sharing Information and Intelligence in a New Era, Guidelines for Establishing and Operating Fusion Centers at the Local, State, and Federal Levels—Law Enforcement Intelligence, Public Safety, and the Private Sector* (Washington, D.C., August 2006).

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## Additional DHS Action Could Help Address Challenges Hindering Northern Border Coordination among Its Components and with Other Federal Agencies

Federal agency coordination to secure the northern border was reported to have improved by some Border Patrol, ICE, Forest Service, and DEA officials operating within the four sectors we visited; however, in all sectors officials cited problems with others in sharing information and resources for daily operations. DHS attention to resolving these long-standing coordination challenges could enhance its ability to implement its strategic vision for a coordinated homeland security enterprise and improve the federal capacity to secure the northern border.

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## DHS Action Could Help Address Border Patrol and ICE Coordination Challenges

Border Patrol officials in three of the four sectors we visited cited strong or improved coordination with ICE in sharing information and coordinating their border security missions, but ICE officials in all but one sector reported that coordination with Border Patrol remained challenging. CBP and ICE had developed an MOU between Border Patrol and ICE in 2004, updated in 2007, to establish and coordinate roles and responsibilities for interdiction and investigation missions on the border, and as a mechanism to resolve conflict or disagreements.<sup>38</sup> The 2007 MOU requires the two agencies to establish a seamless, real-time operational partnership, with Border Patrol taking the lead on all border-related interdiction activities, and ICE taking the lead on investigations.

Coordination between Border Patrol and ICE was cited as strong or greatly improved by Border Patrol officials in two sectors, and ICE officials in one sector, who cited different reasons for the improvements in coordination. For example, Border Patrol officials in the Spokane sector said that there was considerable improvement in their relationship with ICE since the MOU was established in 2004, and attributed improved coordination to sector leadership, open lines of communication, and personal friendships between agents. ICE officials operating within the Detroit sector said that their relationship with Border Patrol had matured,

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<sup>38</sup>CBP and ICE, *Guidelines Governing the Interaction between ICE's Office of Investigations (OI) and CBP's Office of Border Patrol (OBP)* (Washington, D.C., 2004), and Addendum to *Guidelines Governing the Interaction between ICE's Office of Investigations (OI) and CBP's Office of Border Patrol (OBP)* (Washington, D.C., 2007).

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and they generally worked well to support each other's mission. They cited that improved coordination resulted from collocation of Border Patrol agents in the BEST and the close relationships of sector leaders who supported coordination between the components.

However, coordination to exchange information and integrate missions remained challenging according to ICE officials in all four sectors, and Border Patrol officials in two sectors, with all citing problems with the MOU, among other issues. These officials said that the MOU had not been effective in clarifying roles and responsibilities or resolving disagreements about the dividing line between interdiction and investigation. These disagreements surrounded the interpretation and separation of "intelligence-gathering" activities to support Border Patrol's interdiction mission and "investigative" activities that fall under the purview of ICE, as well as the timing and circumstance surrounding when Border Patrol should call ICE for investigative support, as shown by the following examples.

- Border Patrol and ICE officials said that the agencies continue to disagree on whether it is appropriate for Border Patrol agents to interview persons they apprehend. ICE officials state that Border Patrol should call ICE first. However, Border Patrol officials stated that postarrest interviews are within the intelligence-gathering provisions of the interagency MOU.
- Border Patrol and ICE officials continue to disagree on whether border surveillance falls under ICE's investigative role. Border Patrol officials in the Spokane sector provided an example of ICE officials conducting surveillance of the border, which is the responsibility of Border Patrol under the MOU; however, ICE officials in all four sectors maintained that these intelligence gathering activities were an inherent part of the ICE investigative role.
- Border Patrol and ICE officials said that there is disagreement on when Border Patrol is required to call ICE to inspect seized contraband. For example, ICE officials operating within the Detroit sector interpreted the MOU as requiring Border Patrol to notify ICE of the contraband at the arrest site to inform investigations. However, Border Patrol officials in the Detroit sector interpreted the MOU as allowing agents to transport the contraband to the station for identification and calling ICE once established that it could develop into an investigation. While Border Patrol officials in the Spokane sector stated that evidence gathering is an inherent function of their role under the MOU, ICE officials in the Spokane sector viewed this practice as inappropriate handling and processing of evidence that hindered ICE's investigations.

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Border Patrol officials in three sectors and ICE officials operating within two sectors stated that competition for performance statistics was another barrier to overcoming coordination challenges as these statistics are the basis for DHS resource allocation decisions.<sup>39</sup> As a result, both Border Patrol and ICE officials said that agents sometimes worked outside of their established roles and responsibilities to boost performance statistics, and disagreed on which component should receive credit for apprehensions, seizures, and prosecutions.

DHS has plans to revise its performance measures and processes for resource allocation across components; however, our discussions with DHS officials have shown that it will be difficult to ensure these revisions do not exacerbate current challenges to collaboration in support of the QHSR.<sup>40</sup> For example, officials from the DHS Office of Strategic Plans said that the department is developing new performance measures for border security that may require each component to show how their efforts linked with the efforts of others to secure the border, and that resources would be distributed across the components according to their relative success.

The coordination challenges between Border Patrol and ICE resulted in a lack of information sharing and potential inefficiencies, according to Border Patrol and ICE officials operating within three of the sectors we visited. Specifically, ICE officials operating within the Detroit, Spokane, and Swanton sectors said they are reluctant to share intelligence information with Border Patrol because they are concerned Border Patrol may adversely affect an ICE investigation. Border Patrol officials in the Detroit sector said that because they do not believe ICE shares information with them, coordination with ICE is hindered. Additionally, these Border Patrol officials stated that, from their perspective, the lack of information sharing between the agencies resulted in inefficient border security efforts. Similarly, the Border Patrol officials in the Blaine sector

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<sup>39</sup>ICE and Border Patrol in Blaine sector said that there was no overlap in their work, and thus no competition between the components. ICE officials in Detroit said that competition did not exist with Border Patrol; however, Border Patrol did not agree.

<sup>40</sup>According to CBP officials, CBP, ICE, and the USCG are currently discussing improvements to their performance metrics that may lead to crosscutting performance measures. These discussions consist of the potential to develop an implementation plan for regularly reporting illegal migrant data flow from all law enforcement entities to resolve duplicate counting. CBP could not provide a time frame for such a plan, and it is unclear how resolving duplicate counting will help address competition for performance metrics between the northern border partners.



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reported that the lack of information sharing resulted in inefficiencies as Border Patrol has used its resources to respond to potential cross-border criminals who were ICE agents engaged in undercover investigations.

These coordination problems between Border Patrol and ICE have been long-standing and the subject of several studies and reports. We reported in 2005 that the effectiveness of ICE's antismuggling strategy would depend partly on the clarification of ICE and CBP roles in antismuggling activities.<sup>41</sup> In 2006, the Congressional Research Service reported, after interviewing agents in Los Angeles and San Diego, that ICE and CBP had problems with communications that compromised some smuggling investigations.<sup>42</sup> In both 2005 and 2007, the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) reported on the coordination challenges between CBP and ICE, including those challenges between Border Patrol and ICE's Homeland Security Investigations.<sup>43</sup> The 2005 report concluded that shortfalls in operational coordination and information sharing had fostered an environment of uncertainty and mistrust between CBP and ICE personnel in the field, and instead of collegial interaction, field officials reported competition, and at times, interference. In its 2007 update, the OIG reported improvement, but additional work was necessary to address remaining challenges related to improving intelligence and information sharing, strengthening performance measures, and addressing ongoing relational issues.

DHS took several actions in response to past findings, but our work for this review showed that ongoing coordination challenges continue to exist between DHS components. For example, CBP and ICE issued an addendum to strengthen the MOU between CBP and ICE, and established an ICE-CBP Coordination Council to ensure, among other things, that component policies and procedures supported the roles and responsibilities outlined in the MOU and were communicated and implemented in the field. DHS concurred with its OIG's recommendation

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<sup>41</sup>GAO, *Combating Alien Smuggling: Opportunities Exist to Improve the Federal Response*, GAO-05-305 (Washington, D.C.: May 27, 2005).

<sup>42</sup>Congressional Research Service, *Immigration Enforcement within the United States*, RL33351 (Washington, D.C., Apr. 6, 2006).

<sup>43</sup>DHS, Office of Inspector General, *An Assessment of the Proposal to Merge Customs and Border Protection with Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, and DHS, Office of Inspector General, *DHS' Progress in Addressing Coordination Challenges Between Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement*.

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to establish joint CBP-ICE bodies to oversee the implementation of the MOU's provisions but did not establish such an oversight body, stating that the establishment of the Coordination Council and other working groups would coordinate interagency efforts.<sup>44</sup> The Coordination Council has since been disbanded, and the DHS officials from the Office of Intelligence and Analysis and the Office of Operations Coordination and Planning were unfamiliar with the council and could not provide an explanation for why it was discontinued. DHS continues to lack an entity to oversee the implementation of the MOU because the agency relies on CBP and ICE leaders to hold the field accountable for implementation of established agreements. Additionally, according to DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis officials, components often leave coordination challenges for field leadership to resolve without adequate guidance from headquarters.

DHS component field officials, DHS headquarters officials, and the DHS OIG acknowledged that there remains a disconnect between headquarters policy and field implementation that may require DHS-level oversight to correct.<sup>45</sup> For example, Border Patrol and ICE officials in two of the sectors we visited said that DHS action, as a higher authority, could help mitigate different priorities between its components, provide a unifying direction, and quickly address problems.<sup>46</sup> DHS headquarters officials from several offices agreed,<sup>47</sup> stating that many DHS components do not consistently enforce information-sharing practices contained in interagency agreements, and that field agents are left to resolve coordination challenges without adequate headquarters guidance.

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<sup>44</sup>The OIG stated that effective policy implementation requires constant monitoring by headquarters and that field managers be held accountable when those policies are violated.

<sup>45</sup>The OIG noted that there was a disconnect between headquarters' perceptions of what occurred in the field and what the OIG observed, and that headquarters officials were unaware that the numerous policy memorandums and correspondence were not implemented in the field.

<sup>46</sup>The OIG had reported that at headquarters, there was inadequate staffing and authority to prevent CBP and ICE from working at cross-purposes, headquarters did not intervene to effectively coordinate operations, and it was slow to resolve conflicts.

<sup>47</sup>DHS headquarters offices included the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the Office of General Counsel, the Information Sharing and Collaboration Branch, the Office of US-VISIT, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, the Coast Guard Investigative Service, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, among numerous others who concurred on this input.

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According to the OIG official we interviewed, DHS oversight of its interagency MOUs could help promote the “One-DHS” culture.<sup>48</sup>

Although DHS has relied on component-level management to ensure that components coordinate information and operations in the field, the long-standing and continuing coordination challenges between ICE and Border Patrol highlight the importance of developing a permanent solution to oversee and address these challenges. We previously reported that federal agencies engaged in collaborative efforts need to create the means to monitor and evaluate their efforts to enable them to identify areas for improvement.<sup>49</sup> DHS oversight of MOU implementation, including evaluating the outstanding challenges and developing planned corrective actions, could better ensure that the MOUs are facilitating coordination as intended, and that components are held accountable for adherence to provisions within established agreements.

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### DHS Action Could Help to Address Coordination Challenges with Other Federal Agencies

Border Patrol, ICE, Forest Service, and DEA officials reported ongoing coordination challenges in the four sectors we visited, despite DHS action to improve coordination between these federal agencies that have overlapping missions or operational boundaries. Additional DHS action to provide oversight and enforce compliance with established agreements across federal agencies could help further QHSR priorities of unity of effort and integrated operations in conducting interdiction and investigation on northern borderlands.

### Forest Service and Border Patrol Remained Challenged in Coordinating Interdiction Efforts

Border Patrol and Forest Service officials we interviewed in the Blaine and Spokane sectors reported efforts to improve coordination among these agencies, but that sharing information on border security intelligence and operations remained problematic.<sup>50</sup> An interagency agreement coordinating the missions of these agencies was established in a 2006

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<sup>48</sup>The phrase “One-DHS” was coined following the Secretary of Homeland Security’s February 2007 memo that outlined DHS’s policy for information exchange and sharing. DHS, *DHS Policy for Internal Information Exchange and Sharing* (Washington, D.C., Feb. 1, 2007).

<sup>49</sup>[GAO-06-15](#).

<sup>50</sup>According to Forest Service near the Detroit area, the border security–related activities conducted by Forest Service fall within the Grand Forks sector, which is not within the scope of this review. Also, according to Border Patrol in Swanton, the DHS-DOI-USDA MOU is not applicable to their sector. As such, Forest Service in Detroit and Swanton were not included in this review.

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MOU among DHS, DOI, and USDA. The MOU outlines respective roles and responsibilities of each agency when operating on federal lands, providing Border Patrol's role to detect and apprehend illegal cross-border activity, and Forest Service's role to apprehend and investigate persons conducting illegal activities on federal lands. The agreement also requires the agencies and their component offices—including Border Patrol and Forest Service—to coordinate efforts in a number of areas, including sharing information about threats and operations.<sup>51</sup>

In the Blaine sector, Forest Service officials reported that coordination was lacking due to limited interaction and inattention by leadership. Although the interagency agreement establishes that the agencies are to prioritize coordination, little coordination was taking place and there was not an established relationship between the agencies in the Blaine sector, according to the officials we interviewed. Border Patrol disagreed and stated that it had assigned a Public Lands Liaison to coordinate operations on federal lands, but Forest Service officials said that contact had been minimal, due in part to turnover. While Forest Service officials were hopeful that coordination could occur through the Border Lands Management Task Force, they were not receiving information about the location of Border Patrol assets or operations on Forest Service lands.

In the Spokane sector, officials reported that coordination was strained by disagreements on roles and responsibilities when operating on Forest Service land. For example, Forest Service law enforcement officials stated that surveillance, patrol, and investigation of potential cross-border criminal activity on federal borderlands are an inherent part of Forest Service's mission to safeguard natural resources and public safety. However, Border Patrol officials stated that Forest Service actions to use sensors and other resources to monitor cross-border activity have led to duplication and overlap with Border Patrol's mission and operation at the border. While Border Patrol and Forest Service issued a local MOU in 2008 that more specifically defined roles and responsibilities between the two agencies for the Spokane sector Border Patrol and the Northern Region Forest Service Office, agency officials in the Spokane sector continued to disagree on the division of roles and responsibilities when cross-border illegal activity moves past the border and onto Forest Service land.

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<sup>51</sup>DHS, DOI, and USDA, *Memorandum of Understanding Among U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of Interior, and U.S. Department of Agriculture Regarding Cooperative National Security and Counterterrorism Efforts on Federal Lands along the United States' Borders* (Washington, D.C., 2006).

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Another local-level MOU was issued in 2009 to more specifically address roles and responsibilities between the agencies on Forest Service lands patrolled by three Border Patrol stations, but challenges continue in coordinating border security intelligence and operations between these agencies.

The coordination challenges between Forest Service and Border Patrol resulted in a lack of information sharing, inefficiencies, and within the Spokane sector an overall breakdown of coordination efforts, according to Forest Service officials operating within the Blaine and Spokane sectors and Border Patrol officials operating within the Spokane sector. According to Forest Service law enforcement officials operating within the Blaine sector, Border Patrol does not share information in a timely manner due to concerns that Forest Service cannot be trusted with certain types of information. Border Patrol officials in the Spokane sector cited similar concerns, and said that Forest Service leadership is reluctant to share information with Border Patrol. However, Forest Service officials operating in the Spokane sector disagreed stating that they are willing to share information with Border Patrol. Officials from both agencies agreed that these challenges may result in inefficiencies and a breakdown of coordination, ultimately leading to the risk of a border that is less secure.

DHS action was needed to resolve these coordination challenges between the agencies, according to Border Patrol officials in the Spokane sector. Within the Spokane sector, Forest Service officials stated that DHS headquarters action has not resulted in cooperation or substantive change in field locations, and we recently reported that action was needed by DHS and USDA to ensure that established agreements were proactively implemented to prevent coordination challenges.<sup>52</sup> Specifically, we recommended that, in part, DHS and USDA take the necessary action to ensure that personnel at all levels of each agency conduct early and continued consultations to implement provisions of the 2006 MOU, including determining agencies' information needs for intelligence. Both DHS and USDA agreed with our recommendation and, while CBP stated that it would issue a memorandum to all Border Patrol sectors emphasizing the importance of its partnerships, as of October 2010, additional steps to fully address this recommendation have not yet been taken.

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<sup>52</sup> [GAO-11-177](#).

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## ICE and DEA Officials Remained Challenged to Coordinate Investigations

ICE and DEA faced ongoing challenges coordinating northern border security investigations, according to ICE and DEA officials in all four sectors. Agreements coordinating the investigative missions of these agencies include a 1994 MOU between the U.S. Customs Service—a DHS legacy agency—and DEA.<sup>53</sup> ICE and DEA updated this MOU in the June 2009 interagency cooperation agreement to reflect the current organization under DHS, and also to harness both agencies' expertise and avoid operational conflicts in order to most effectively dismantle and disrupt trafficking organizations.<sup>54</sup> Although the interagency agreement establishes that the agencies are to improve information and deconfliction efforts, the MOU had not yet resulted in improved coordination between the agencies 1 year after the updated agreement was in place, according to ICE officials operating in three sectors we visited, and DEA officials operating in all four sectors. The coordination challenges between ICE and DEA resulted in a lack of information sharing, or potential inefficiencies, resulting in the risk of investigations that were delayed or hindered, according to ICE and DEA officials operating within the four sectors we visited.

DEA officials we interviewed in all four sectors attributed the coordination challenges with ICE to different interpretations of the MOU provisions related to jurisdiction for drug investigations. Although DEA has full jurisdiction for domestic and foreign drug investigations, as a result of separate interagency agreements DEA takes the lead on drug investigations originating between the ports of entry while ICE takes the lead on drug investigations originating at the ports of entry. These geographic distinctions can be confusing, according to a DEA official operating in the Blaine sector. By contrast, ICE officials operating in the four sectors we visited did not have concerns about differing interpretations of the roles and responsibilities laid out in the agreement. Specifically, ICE officials in the Spokane sector stated that both agencies are investigative so they interpret the roles and responsibilities similarly.

ICE officials we interviewed in all four sectors attributed the coordination challenges with DEA to separate DEA agreements with Border Patrol and

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<sup>53</sup>We previously reported that the 1994 MOU between ICE and DEA was outdated and not reflective of the reorganization of the U.S. Customs Service into ICE. [GAO-09-63](#).

<sup>54</sup>DEA and ICE, *Interagency Cooperation Agreement Between the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Immigration and Customs Enforcement Regarding Investigative Functions Related to the Controlled Substances Act* (Washington, D.C., 2009).

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Canada's RCMP that, from ICE's perspective, exclude ICE from exchanges of intelligence information and operations that could benefit ICE investigations.<sup>55</sup> According to ICE officials, under the DEA agreement with RCMP, ICE is excluded from efforts to coordinate international drug smuggling investigations.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, ICE officials said that per the DEA agreement with Border Patrol, Border Patrol provides DEA instead of ICE the right of first refusal in referrals of drug seizures. ICE officials stated this MOU creates a strain on ICE's relationships with Border Patrol and DEA, and also causes confusion that can hinder investigations and create inefficiencies. DEA headquarters officials disagreed that ICE is excluded as ICE has access to mechanisms DEA uses to share information with law enforcement partners, such as the Special Operations Division and the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force.<sup>57</sup>

ICE and DEA officials operating within three sectors also attributed the ongoing coordination challenges between the agencies to overlapping missions and competition for leading investigations, as both agencies have a mission to disrupt and dismantle criminal organizations that smuggle drugs as well as other contraband across the border. A DEA official operating within the Swanton sector stated that mission overlap creates too much competition for the same work, as well as receiving credit for that work. DEA officials operating within the Spokane sector agreed, stating that competition is an inherent problem when multiple investigative agencies exist because their budgets are tied to the seizure and investigation statistics they generate.

Additional DHS action is needed to resolve coordination challenges between ICE and DEA, according to ICE officials we interviewed in all

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<sup>55</sup>RCMP officials agreed that the MOU adversely affects ICE and they are periodically caught in the middle of disputes between ICE and DEA.

<sup>56</sup>According to headquarters officials from DEA, it is important for one agency to speak for the U.S. government on its policies pertaining to drug investigations. These officials explained that if other U.S. entities do not coordinate through DEA and begin speaking directly to foreign governments and law enforcement personnel, contradictory information may be provided, causing confusion.

<sup>57</sup>The Special Operations Division is a multiagency operational coordination center that coordinates various enforcement efforts by identifying connections among and between disparate investigative and enforcement activities to build a comprehensive strategy against criminal organizations. Additionally, the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force fusion center is an intelligence and data center containing all drug and drug-related financial intelligence information from various investigative agencies including ICE.

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four sectors and DEA officials in two sectors we visited, and as recommended in our previous report.<sup>58</sup> DEA officials operating within the Spokane sector said that oversight of established agreements was necessary to ensure that they are implemented and work to facilitate coordination. According to DEA officials in the Spokane sector, this oversight should consist of an overarching authoritative body—with no ties, affiliations, or bias toward a particular agency or political party—tasked with reviewing established MOUs between law enforcement entities to determine when coordination is being facilitated or hindered. We previously reported that federal agencies can enhance and sustain their collaborative efforts by, in part, developing mechanisms to monitor their results.<sup>59</sup> In addition, we recommended in March 2009 that DOJ and DHS take action to provide oversight of established interagency agreements.<sup>60</sup> We also recommended that the agencies develop processes to periodically monitor implementation of the agreements and make any needed adjustments. DOJ concurred with the recommendations, but DHS did not concur to monitor implementation of the agreements, and to-date this recommendation remains unaddressed.<sup>61</sup> DEA and ICE signed a revised MOU in June 2009, but according to our work conducted in August 2010, the MOU had not yet resulted in resolution of coordination challenges in the four sectors we visited. DEA officials at headquarters commented that, while the 2009 agreement is entering its evaluation period, not enough time has elapsed since the signing of the agreement to assess its effectiveness. The challenges we have identified with northern border coordination between DHS and its federal partners underscore the importance of implementing past recommendations to ensure oversight that reinforces accountability when establishing a partnership through a written agreement.

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<sup>58</sup>[GAO-09-63](#).

<sup>59</sup>[GAO-06-15](#).

<sup>60</sup>We reported on the long-standing disputes between ICE and DEA and the disagreement on each other's roles and responsibilities, recommending that the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security issue a revised agreement between the agencies to establish effective collaboration practices, defined roles, responsibilities, and shared goals to preclude duplication and ensure officer safety. [GAO-09-63](#).

<sup>61</sup>At the request of the Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, we began work to determine the extent to which DEA and ICE have taken actions to implement the June 2009 interagency cooperation agreement on counternarcotics investigations, including developing processes for monitoring the implementation of the agreement. As part of this work, we plan to also assess the status of the recommendations made in [GAO-09-63](#).



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## DHS Reported Limited Progress in Securing the Northern Border, but Assessing Partner Contributions Could Inform Decisions in Addressing Remaining Vulnerabilities

DHS reported limited progress in securing the northern border, but processes Border Patrol used to assess border security and resource requirements did not include the extent that northern border partnerships and resources were available or used to address border security vulnerabilities. DHS action to develop guidance and policy for including partner contributions in these processes could provide the agency and Congress with more complete information in making funding and resource allocation decisions.

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## Despite Limited Progress, Most Northern Border Miles Remained Vulnerable to Exploitation and There Is a Reliance on Outside Law Enforcement Support

Few northern border miles had reached an acceptable level of security as of fiscal year end 2010, according to Border Patrol security assessments. CBP measures border security between the ports of entry by the number of miles under effective control of Border Patrol.<sup>62</sup> DHS reports these results in its annual performance report to Congress and the public, based on border security assessments conducted by each Border Patrol sector that are included in each sector's ORBBP. Our review of these reports for 2010 showed that for the northern border overall, 32 of the nearly 4,000 border miles had reached an acceptable level of control, with 9 of these miles included in the four sectors we visited. The remaining miles were assessed at levels that Border Patrol reported are not acceptable end states. These border miles are defined as vulnerable to exploitation due to issues related to accessibility and resource availability and, as a result, there is a high degree of reliance on law enforcement support from outside the border zone.

CBP also does not have the ability to detect illegal activity across most of the northern border. Because most areas of the northern border are remote and inaccessible by traditional patrol methods, CBP's Northern Border Strategy states that one of the goals of Border Patrol is to reach full

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<sup>62</sup>CBP's performance measure for border miles and coastal sectors under effective control tracks the number of miles where the appropriate mix of personnel, technology, and tactical infrastructure has been put in place to reasonably assure that when an illegal entry is detected, the Border Patrol has the ability to respond and the illegal entry is brought to a satisfactory law enforcement resolution.

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situational awareness along the northern border.<sup>63</sup> This strategy defines full situational awareness as an area where the probability of detection is high; however, the ability to respond is defined by accessibility to the area or availability of resources, or both. At this level, CBP states that partnerships with other law enforcement agencies play an important role in resolving the illegal entries. Our review of sector ORBBP documents for fiscal year 2010 showed that for the northern border overall, about 1,007 of the nearly 4,000 northern border miles had reached this definition of full situational awareness, with 398 of these miles included in the four sectors we visited.<sup>64</sup> CBP reported that the number of miles under control is expected to increase as Border Patrol continues to put in place additional resources based on risk, threat potential, and operational need.

CBP had planned to implement its northern border strategy and reinforce overall security of the northern border over the next 4 years with a range of initiatives involving increased staffing, cutting-edge technology, increased infrastructure, and enhanced interagency partnerships. At the time of our review, however, CBP had not yet issued an implementation plan because it was unclear how CBP's strategy for the northern border may change in response to the recently issued QHSR and a departmentwide strategy for the northern border, scheduled for issuance later this year.

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<sup>63</sup>DHS, *CBP Northern Border Strategy*.

<sup>64</sup>According to CBP officials, they are working to update their definitions of border security for the northern border as they explore a more accurate means to depict northern border security. Additionally, RCMP officials stated that RCMP and CBP are collaborating on developing a joint border security assessment. In the meantime, however, effective control and full situational awareness are the metrics reported in DHS's Annual Performance Report as those used to measure northern border security.

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## Including Partner Contributions in Border Security Assessments Could Provide a More Complete Picture of Border Security Risk and Resources

Border Patrol's National Strategy states that, in part, reliance on border fencing and personnel help secure control over the southern border, while on the northern border, partnerships and the sharing of intelligence are critical to success.<sup>65</sup> While CBP's Northern Border Strategy states that these partnerships are crucial to securing the northern border, our review of the 2010 ORBBPs for the Blaine, Spokane, Detroit, and Swanton sectors showed that these sectors had identified various levels of additional personnel, technology, and infrastructure necessary to increase border control, but did not identify the extent that partnerships and their resources were available to address border vulnerabilities.

- Under Operation Stonegarden, DHS provided approximately \$11.2 million in 3-year grants to northern border state, local, or tribal governments to augment Border Patrol staff and resources on the border in fiscal year 2010. However, the extent that these additional staff and resources addressed border security vulnerabilities in the four sectors we visited was not reflected in the ORBBPs.
- The IBET for the Spokane sector maintained a centralized listing of resources available among its partners, including cameras, satellite phones, and ground sensors, that Border Patrol also requested in its ORBBP. However, Border Patrol did not reflect the availability of these partner resources to address border security vulnerabilities in the sector.<sup>66</sup>

One reason why partner contributions are not identified and assessed is because Border Patrol guidance does not require partner resources to be incorporated into Border Patrol security assessments, or in documents that inform the resource planning process. The ORBBPs state the importance of partnerships to border security, and list federal, state, local, and international partners in the sector. However, partner resources that were available to address border security gaps in each sector were not identified despite DHS investment in these efforts. We previously reported that federal agencies must identify ways to deliver results more efficiently

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<sup>65</sup>These differences are due to the relative differences in the number of illegal migrants and criminals crossing the southwest and northern borders. For example, DHS data show that in fiscal year 2009, apprehensions of inadmissible aliens along the northern border were approximately 1.3 percent of the number of apprehensions along the southwest border, and pounds of illegal narcotics seized along the northern border were about 1.6 percent of the pounds seized along the southwest border.

<sup>66</sup>According to IBET's resource data, 188 ground sensors are available in the Spokane sector. Of the 188 sensors available, Border Patrol controls 149 sensors, while the remaining 39 sensors are under Forest Service.

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and in a way that is consistent with multiple demands and limited resources.<sup>67</sup> To do this, we reported that agencies should, in part, identify the personnel, technology, and infrastructure resources available among the collaborating agencies to help identify opportunities to address different levels of resources by leveraging across partners, thus obtaining benefits that would not be available if they were working separately.

CBP officials acknowledged the need to link partnership results to border security goals, but said that the methodologies for border security assessments and resource requirements documented in the ORBBP were designed to be Border Patrol–centric. As such, the processes in place reflect the extent that Border Patrol, exclusive of its partners, had sufficient resources to detect, apprehend, and achieve an effective law enforcement resolution. One reason these officials said that partner contributions are excluded is that the ORBBP is used as a basis for sector budget requests. Therefore, including partner resources could disadvantage individual sectors, the Office of Border Patrol, and CBP in the DHS resource allocation process. However, Border Patrol may still benefit from identifying partner resources separately from their budget requests so they have a better understanding of the resources available to them to help secure the border.

Another reason cited by officials for excluding partner resources is that these partners are not under the control of Border Patrol, and therefore cannot be relied upon to sustain the border security mission. As such, Border Patrol requires a set of resources that are not at risk of being deployed away from the border if partners have a higher priority or competing mission. Although these partners' resources may have competing missions, they are intended to supplement not sustain the border security mission. However, identifying how these partner resources and contributions could supplement Border Patrol's efforts on the border could better position CBP to target coordination efforts and make more efficient resource allocation decisions. Moreover, including partner resources in their assessments could better demonstrate the extent to which their coordination efforts can address border security gaps.

The *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* state that periodic comparison and accountability for resources should be made so that agencies can provide reasonable assurance that their objectives are

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<sup>67</sup> [GAO-06-15](#).

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being achieved through the effective and efficient stewardship of public resources.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, we previously reported that DHS has not fully responded to a legislative reporting requirement to link its initiatives—including partnerships—to existing vulnerabilities to inform decisions on federal resource allocations.<sup>69</sup> The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 required the Secretary of Homeland Security to submit a report to Congress that addressed the vulnerabilities along the northern border, and provide recommendations and resources that would be required to address them.<sup>70</sup> Our review of the resulting DHS report submitted to Congress in November 2008 showed a listing of threats, vulnerabilities, and DHS initiatives to address them, but information was not provided to link this information and determine the resources needed to address the remaining security gaps. Our recommendation to DHS to provide more specific information in these areas in future reports to Congress remains unaddressed.

Border Patrol and CBP initiatives to update their resource planning methodology and performance measures provide an opportunity to link the benefits of partnerships to border security. Border Patrol is developing a new methodology for its resource planning documents that could be used to identify the capacity of partners to fill border security gaps. Defined as an Analysis of Alternatives, this methodology calls for field commanders to identify alternatives for achieving border control—other than the resources requested in their resource planning documents. According to DHS’s Office of Policy, this kind of analysis will directly support efforts at the department level to bring strategy and resource allocation into closer alignment, including analysis of capability requirements derived from the strategy. As Border Patrol continues to refine the guidance and policy supporting this effort, considering the extent that this process, among others, could be used to assess available partner resources and potentially leverage such resources to fill Border Patrol resource gaps could better position CBP to target coordination

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<sup>68</sup> GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

<sup>69</sup> As a result of our review in [GAO-09-93](#), we recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security should include in future reports more specific information on the actions, resources, and time frames needed to improve security of the northern border along with any attendant uncertainties, and the basis used to prioritize action and resources for northern border security relative to other areas of national security. As of fiscal year 2010, this recommendation had not yet been implemented. [GAO-09-93](#).

<sup>70</sup> Pub. L. No. 110-53, § 731(a)-(b), 121 Stat. 266, 351.

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efforts and make more efficient resource decisions. Moreover, current measures of partnerships having a positive effect on border security goals are focused on staff and resources CBP provides to partnerships, rather than how the benefits of partnerships address border security gaps.<sup>71</sup> CBP officials acknowledged the limitations of the measures and plan to enhance them pending changes that may be forthcoming in its larger effort to realign measures under a departmentwide strategy for the northern border.

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## Conclusion

Securing the nation's vast and diverse northern border is a daunting task. The nature, size, and complexity of the border highlights the importance of international, federal, state, local, and tribal entities working together to enhance security. Northern border partners reported benefiting from collaboration through interagency forums and joint operations, which have enhanced coordination by facilitating the sharing of intelligence and leveraging of resources between the northern border partners. However, DHS oversight of the forums sponsored by DHS could help address concerns identified by multiple partners and working groups that a lack of attention may result in duplication of efforts across the northern border and inefficient use of partners and their limited resources. Additionally, the challenges we have identified with northern border coordination between DHS components and among federal partners emphasizes the need to establish oversight of MOU compliance between Border Patrol and ICE, and underscores the importance of implementing past recommendations to ensure oversight that reinforces accountability when establishing a partnership through a written agreement. We have previously recommended that ICE and DEA, as well as Border Patrol and Forest Service, take the necessary steps to uphold implementation of their MOUs. As a result of our work, we believe it is important for these agencies to follow through with the recommendations so as to achieve an effective and coordinated approach to address border security issues. While DHS has planning efforts underway to streamline northern border security efforts internally and across its northern border partners, until such plans are implemented, coordination challenges could be preventing partners from receiving vital information needed to effectively secure the border. Finally, by excluding partner resources available to address border

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<sup>71</sup>These measures listed in CBP's Northern Border Strategy include the number of CBP personnel assigned to IBETs, state and local fusion centers, and the RCMP headquarters; the number of joint operations; the number of other agency representatives at CBP, and the percentage of resources focused on priority trade issues and partnerships.

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security gaps in its assessment of northern border needs, DHS may be missing opportunities to target coordination efforts and make more efficient resource decisions. Integrating partner resources in the DHS resource planning process, whether through Border Patrol's Analysis of Alternatives or other means, may provide a more complete picture of border security status and resource requirements on the northern border. Developing policy and guidance to assess the integrated capacity of all northern border partners could also assist DHS in achieving the vision in its QHSR to establish a strategic framework for homeland security that guides all northern border partners to a common end.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

To help ensure DHS is maximizing the benefits of its coordination efforts with northern border partners through interagency forums, documented agreements, and its resource planning process, we recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security take the following three actions:

- Provide DHS-level guidance and oversight for interagency forums established or sponsored by its components to ensure that the missions and locations are not duplicative and to consider the downstream burden on northern border partners.
- Provide regular DHS-level oversight of Border Patrol and ICE compliance with the provisions of the interagency MOU, including evaluation of outstanding challenges and planned corrective actions.
- Direct CBP to develop policy and guidance necessary to identify, assess, and integrate the available partner resources in northern border sector security assessments and resource planning documents.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DHS, USDA, DOD, DOI, and DOJ for their review and comment. In commenting on our draft report, DHS concurred with our recommendations and described actions underway or planned that may directly or indirectly serve to address them. In regard to our first recommendation, DHS stated that the structure of the department precludes using a single headquarters organization to provide DHS-level guidance and oversight for interagency forums established by its components. Instead, DHS said it will review the inventory of interagency forums through its strategic and operational planning efforts to assess efficiency and identify challenges consistent with the forthcoming DHS Northern Border Strategy that will better integrate, coordinate, and achieve northern border management missions. Within the context of these higher-level efforts and any subsequent tactical or operational assessments or planning, we encourage DHS to provide the guidance and oversight necessary to ensure that missions and locations of these forums

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are not duplicative and consider the downstream burden on northern border partners.

In regard to our second recommendation that DHS provide oversight of Border Patrol and ICE compliance with the MOU, DHS stated that it will recommend that the ICE-CBP Coordination Council be resumed, and that proper use of the Coordination Council would enable the recommended DHS-level body to review and evaluate both Border Patrol and ICE compliance with the MOU. We note that in the past, the Coordination Council was unable to improve upon the long-standing coordination challenges between Border Patrol and ICE. Thus, to be effective, a resumed Coordination Council may require changes to its previous structure, although determining what those changes should be was beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, we encourage DHS headquarters to actively work with the Coordination Council and provide the oversight necessary to address the MOU compliance issues identified in our report.

Finally, DHS stated that our third recommendation to develop policy and guidance to identify, assess, and integrate partner resources in northern border security assessments and resource planning would be resolved through formulation of new policy and guidance resulting from three foundational documents to be issued later this year; namely, the departmentwide strategy for the northern border, the Northern Border Strategy Implementation Plan, and the Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Competitiveness between the United States and Canada. We encourage DHS to ensure that within the context of these higher-level strategic efforts and any subsequent tactical or operational assessments or planning, CBP provide consistent policy and guidance on integrating partner resources to help ensure that DHS is maximizing the benefits of its coordination efforts.

In commenting on our draft report, USDA agreed with our recommendations and stated that it will continue to work closely with DHS to support northern border efforts and take the actions necessary to make certain personnel at all levels of the agency implement provisions of the interagency MOU.

DOD, DOI, and DOJ did not have formal comments on our draft report. DHS, DOD, and DOJ provided technical comments, and we obtained technical comments on selected text from state and Canadian officials. We incorporated these technical comments as appropriate. Appendix II contains written comments from DHS. Appendix III contains written comments from USDA.



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As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Attorney General, and interested congressional committees as appropriate. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on GAO's Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8777, or [stanar@gao.gov](mailto:stanar@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix IV.



Richard M. Stana  
Director, Homeland Security and Justice Issues

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*List of Requesters*

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman  
Chairman

The Honorable Susan M. Collins  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka  
Chairman

The Honorable George V. Voinovich  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal  
Workforce, and the District of Columbia  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The Honorable Carl Levin  
United States Senate

The Honorable Jon Tester  
United States Senate

# Appendix I: Officials Operating within the Four Sectors Included in this Review

For the purposes of this review, we interviewed Department of Homeland Security (DHS) headquarters officials with knowledge of DHS coordination efforts and also interviewed federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian field-level officials in the four sectors we visited—Blaine, Spokane, Detroit, and Swanton—with a nexus to security efforts along the northern border to obtain their perspective on DHS coordination efforts.<sup>1</sup> For information related to the two interagency forums in our review—the Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET) and the Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST)—as shown in table 4 below, we interviewed 18 U.S. federal and Canadian law enforcement officials participating in the IBET or the BEST, or both, across the four sectors.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 4: Number of Offices Interviewed for Information on Interagency Forums, by Sector**

	Sector	Agency
1	Blaine	Customs and Border Protection's Office of Border Patrol (Border Patrol)
2		U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
3		U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)
4		Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) <sup>a</sup>
5		Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) <sup>b</sup>
6		Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) <sup>c</sup>
7	Spokane	Border Patrol
8		ICE
9	Detroit	Border Patrol
10		ICE
11		DEA
12		USCG
13		RCMP

<sup>1</sup>Some agencies were not interviewed in certain sectors as they have a limited nexus to border security in that particular sector, for example Forest Service operating in the Detroit and Swanton sectors. Specifically, according to a Forest Service official operating near the Detroit area, the border security-related activities conducted by Forest Service fall within the Grand Forks sector, which is not within the scope of this review. Also, according to Border Patrol in Swanton, the DHS-Department of Interior (DOI)-U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) memorandum of understanding (MOU) is not applicable to its sector. As such, Forest Service in Detroit and Swanton were not included in this review.

<sup>2</sup>At the time of this review, the BEST locations on the northern border included Blaine, Detroit, and Buffalo.

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**Appendix I: Officials Operating within the  
Four Sectors Included in this Review**

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	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Agency</b>
14		CBSA
15	Swanton	Border Patrol
16		ICE
17		RCMP
18		CBSA

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Source: GAO.

<sup>a</sup>We interviewed DEA Blaine and Detroit with regard to their perspective on the BEST in Blaine and Detroit.

<sup>b</sup>We interviewed RCMP Vancouver north of both the Blaine and Spokane sectors. For the purposes of this report, to avoid double counting, we are categorizing it as being part of the Blaine sector.

<sup>c</sup>We interviewed CBSA Vancouver north of both the Blaine and Spokane sectors. For the purposes of this report, to avoid double counting, we are categorizing it as being part of the Blaine sector.

To obtain information on the northern border joint operations, we interviewed officials in 19 offices who participated in one or more of these operations across the Blaine, Spokane, Detroit, and Swanton sectors. These officials represented 2 Canadian offices, 9 U.S. federal offices, 7 state and local offices, and 1 tribal office. See table 5 below.

**Appendix I: Officials Operating within the  
Four Sectors Included in this Review**

**Table 5: Number of Offices Interviewed for Information on Joint Operations, by Sector**

	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Agency</b>
1	Blaine	Border Patrol
2		USCG
3		Washington State Patrol
4		Whatcom County Sheriff
5		RCMP
6	Spokane	Border Patrol
7		ICE
8		Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service)
9		Okanogan County Sheriff
10	Detroit	Border Patrol
11		ICE
12		USCG
13		Michigan State Police
14		Detroit Police Department
15		RCMP
16	Swanton	Border Patrol
17		New York State Police
18		Rouses Point Police
19		St. Regis Mohawk Tribal Police

Source: GAO.

Officials in 30 federal, state, local, and Canadian offices across the four sectors we visited, shown in table 6 below, provided general information on the challenges of interagency forums.

**Appendix I: Officials Operating within the  
Four Sectors Included in this Review**

**Table 6: Number of Offices Interviewed for Information on the Challenges of  
Interagency Forums, by Sector**

	<b>Sector</b>	<b>Agency</b>
1	Blaine	Border Patrol
2		ICE
3		USCG
4		DOJ's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
5		DEA
6		Washington State Patrol
7		Whatcom County Sheriff
8		RCMP
9		CBSA
10	Spokane	Border Patrol
11		ICE
12		FBI
13		National Park Service
14		Okanogan County Sheriff
15	Detroit	Border Patrol
16		ICE
17		USCG
18		FBI
19		DEA
20		Michigan State Police
21		Detroit Police Department
22		RCMP
23		CBSA
24		Swanton
25	ICE	
26	FBI	
27	New York State Police	
28	Rouses Point Police	
29	RCMP	
30	CBSA	

Source: GAO.

# Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland  
Security**

December 3, 2010

Mr. Richard M. Stana  
Director  
Homeland Security and Justice  
Government Accountability Office  
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Stana:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report entitled, "BORDER SECURITY: Enhanced DHS Oversight and Assessment of Interagency Coordination Is Needed for the Northern Border" GAO-11-97, dated December 2010. GAO was asked to address the extent to which the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has (1) improved coordination with state, local, tribal, and Canadian partners; (2) progressed in addressing past federal coordination challenges; and (3) progressed in securing the northern border and used coordination efforts to address existing vulnerabilities.

The U.S. northern border continues to be important to our national security. Our work there is of critical importance — we must always be vigilant toward the security of our borders and toward the enforcement of trade laws, which we can accomplish while facilitating and expanding the flow of legitimate trade and travel that is critical to our nation's economy. Equally, we must ensure safety and resiliency before, during, and after disasters. In keeping with this critical balance, state-of-the-art technologies and infrastructure improvements are utilized to ensure the efficient movement of legitimate trade and travel across the northern border. Fortified partnerships, intelligence, and information sharing initiatives are critical and act as force multipliers that provide comprehensive awareness of the northern border environment to our strategically placed personnel.

Since the establishment of DHS in 2003, a number of steps have been taken to improve security along the northern border while facilitating the flow of legitimate trade and travel. These notable steps by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) include the deployment of additional Border Patrol Agents, CBP Officers, and Air and Marine Interdiction Agents; expanding use of northern border trusted traveler programs; the deployment of radiation portal monitors to northern border ports of entry; the deployment of border security technology solutions to the Great Lakes region; and the establishment of new northern border air branches and several northern border marine branches.

GAO made three recommendations to help ensure DHS is maximizing the benefits of its coordination efforts with northern border partners through interagency forums, documented

- 2 -

agreements, and its resource planning process. The recommendations and DHS's actions to address the recommendations are described below.

**Recommendation 1:** Provide DHS-level guidance and oversight for interagency forums established or sponsored by its components to ensure that the missions and locations are not duplicative and to consider the downstream burden on northern border partners.

**Response:** Concur. DHS concurs with the recommendation that DHS headquarters provide guidance and oversight for interagency forums established or sponsored by its components. DHS headquarters consists of organizations, including the Management Directorate, the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the Office of Policy, the Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement, and the Office of Operations Coordination and Planning, that engage with operational components in many areas. The Department operates under this broad engagement structure to ensure that headquarters components support operational components in all DHS mission areas while simultaneously maintaining the ability to adapt to evolving Department-wide priorities and objectives. While it is important that each headquarters component engage with the operational components within their respective areas of expertise, the structure of the Department precludes the accomplishment of this goal through a single headquarters organization devoted specifically to the northern border and interagency forums. Each DHS component, individually and in conjunction with other DHS components, other Federal departments and agencies, and myriad external partners and stakeholders is ultimately responsible for executing DHS's mission. Through DHS strategic and operational planning efforts, DHS will review the inventory of forums to assess efficiency and identify challenges. This effort will be consistent with the Department's forthcoming unified DHS Northern Border Strategy, as mentioned in the report, which will provide Department-wide guidance to better integrate, coordinate, and achieve its northern border management missions.

**Recommendation 2:** Provide regular DHS-level oversight of Border Patrol and U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement compliance with the provisions of the interagency memorandum of understanding, including evaluation of outstanding challenges and planned corrective actions.

**Response:** DHS concurs with the recommendation that DHS-level oversight is needed to ensure Border Patrol and ICE compliance with the interagency MOU. However, as the draft report explains, CBP and ICE established the ICE-CBP Coordination Council to ensure that operational component policies and procedures supported the roles and responsibilities outlined in the MOU and were communicated to and implemented in the field. DHS recommends that the use of this tool, as laid out in the MOU addendum, be resumed and utilized to fulfill its intended purpose. Proper use of the Coordination Council would enable the recommended DHS-level body to review and evaluate both Border Patrol and ICE compliance with the MOU. Relevant DHS headquarters components should keep abreast of and engaged with the efforts of the Coordination Council to provide additional guidance if necessary. Due to the success of the MOU in several regions along the border, many of the implementation decisions for the MOU are better suited to the subject matter experts within the operational components, with DHS headquarters components providing any higher-level guidance necessary.



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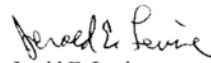
**Recommendation 3:** Direct CBP to develop policy and guidance necessary to identify, assess, and integrate the available partner resources in northern border sector security assessments and resource planning documents.

**Response:** Concur. CBP acknowledges the existence of the challenges cited in the draft report and agrees that CBP should have a consistent policy and consistent approach towards identifying, assessing and integrating partner resources into security assessments and resource planning. It is important that CBP identify partnerships and the resources available to increase overall border security. Doing so along the border could better position CBP to target coordination efforts and make more efficient resource allocation decisions. Moreover, including partner resources in border assessments could better demonstrate the extent to which coordination efforts can address border security gaps.

CBP and DHS have worked together to accomplish a great deal. Both have forged stronger relationships with partner agencies within the U.S. government and with international partners. This recommendation will be resolved in the context of the Department-wide strategy for the northern border, the DHS Northern Border Strategy Implementation Plan, tentatively scheduled for issuance later this year; and the Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Competitiveness: A Declaration by the President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister of Canada, tentatively scheduled for signature in December 2010. CBP's existing strategy for the northern border may change in response to the issuance of these three foundational documents. Existing CBP-wide and component office policies and the formulation of new policy and guidance will result from the issuance of these documents.

CBP appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report, particularly on the recommendation. We place great value in resolving the issues identified in the report.

Sincerely,



Jerald E. Levine  
Director  
Departmental GAO/OIG Liaison Office

# Appendix III: Comments from the U.S. Department of Agriculture



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Washington  
Office

1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

File Code: 1420

Date: NOV 22 2010

Richard M. Stana  
Homeland Security and Justice  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G. Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Stana:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide comment on the draft U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report on "Border Security: Enhanced DHS Oversight and Assessment of Interagency Coordination Is Needed for the Northern Border (GAO-11-97)." The Forest Service has reviewed the report and generally concurs with the report's observations and recommendations. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) will continue to work closely with DHS to support their efforts to mitigate northern border vulnerabilities and ensure that established agreements are proactively implemented to prevent coordination challenges. The USDA will continue to take the necessary action to make certain that personnel at all levels conduct early and continued consultations to implement provisions of the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding, including determining agencies' information needs for intelligence.

If you have any questions, please contact Donna M. Carmical, Chief Financial Officer, at (202) 205-1321 or [dcarmical@fs.fed.us](mailto:dcarmical@fs.fed.us).

Sincerely,

*be* THOMAS L. TIDWELL  
Chief



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# Appendix IV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Richard M. Stana, (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov

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## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Cindy Ayers, Assistant Director, and Dawn Locke, analyst-in-charge, managed this assignment. Susan Czachor, Josh Diosomito, and Kelly Liptan made significant contributions to the work. David Alexander assisted with the design and methodology, and Frances Cook provided legal support. Jessica Orr, Robert Robinson, Debbie Sebastian, Neil Asaba, Carolyn Blocker, Lisa Canini, and Richard Eiserman assisted with report preparation.

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# Related GAO Products

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*Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Ensure a Coordinated Federal Response to Illegal Activity on Federal Lands.* [GAO-11-177](#). Washington, D.C.: November 18, 2010.

*Information Sharing: Federal Agencies Are Sharing Border and Terrorism Information with Local and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies, but Additional Efforts Are Needed.* [GAO-10-41](#). Washington, D.C.: December 18, 2009.

*Homeland Security: DHS Has Taken Actions to Strengthen Border Security Programs and Operations, but Challenges Remain.* [GAO-08-542T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 6, 2008.

*Homeland Security: Federal Efforts Are Helping to Alleviate Some Challenges Encountered by State and Local Information Fusion Centers.* [GAO-08-35](#). Washington, D.C.: October 30, 2007.

*Border Security: Security Vulnerabilities at Unmanned and Unmonitored U.S. Border Locations.* [GAO-07-884T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 27, 2007.

*Homeland Security: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Collaboration at 24/7 Operations Centers Staffed by Multiple DHS Agencies.* [GAO-07-89](#). Washington, D.C.: October 20, 2006.

*Border Security: Opportunities to Increase Coordination of Air and Marine Assets.* [GAO-05-543](#). Washington, D.C.: August 12, 2005.

*Combating Alien Smuggling: Opportunities Exist to Improve the Federal Response.* [GAO-05-305](#). Washington, D.C.: May 27, 2005.

*Managing for Results: Barriers to Interagency Coordination.* [GAO/GGD-00-106](#). Washington, D.C.: March 29, 2000.

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