

Since the Last Issue: Connor Tapped for DOI Post; EPA Launches Energy Competition

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Whither Interior?

In the June 2013 *Natural Resources & Endangered Species Report*, we discussed dramatic changes at the top of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI or Interior). At the time, it was clear that the Deputy Secretary was leaving and there was no successor at hand. We wondered if there might be a power vacuum at the top of Interior.

On July 30, we got an unexpectedly good answer when President Obama nominated Michael L. Connor to be Deputy Secretary of the Interior. Connor is Commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Interior's water and hydropower agency. Before coming back to Interior in 2009, Connor was a majority counsel to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee from 2001 to 2009, and an attorney/advisor for Interior's Solicitor's Office from 1993 to 2001.

Commenting on Connor's nomination announcement, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said, "He has proven himself to be a thoughtful and collaborative leader on some of the toughest challenges at the Department—including finding sustainable solutions to water challenges in the West and resolving Indian water rights claims." Connor also had strong endorsements from the bipartisan leadership of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which should signal a smooth confirmation process. But given Interior's broad range of responsibilities, it is possible that Connor will face some delay in September. However, he should soon be providing the kind of experienced leadership that Interior needs to sustain its recent successes in energy and natural resources policy and practice.

Federal Energy Efficiency

In June, we wrote that 2013 was an important year in the development and implementation of energy efficiency policy. On August 20, EPA launched the 2013 Energy Star National Building Competition: Battle of the Buildings. Teams from more than 3,000 buildings across the country are competing to see who can most reduce their buildings' energy use.

This competition supports President Obama's Climate Action Plan that proposed cutting waste at buildings and making buildings at least 20% more energy efficient by 2020. The competition specifically targets wasted energy in commercial buildings and will try to motivate businesses to improve energy efficiency, reduce harmful carbon pollution, and save money. The number of participants in the Battle of the Buildings has increased from 14 in 2010—the competition's first year—to more than 3,200 in 2013. In 2012, competitors reportedly cut their energy costs by more than \$50 million and reduced annual greenhouse gas emissions equal to the electricity used by more than 43,000 homes. Midpoint “weigh-in” results will be posted in December 2013, with the winner announced in April 2014.