President Obama and Interior Secretary Salazar have begun to trickle out the new leadership team for the Interior Department. So far, the team is heavy on legal talent. Like Secretary Salazar, the first three nominees to subordinate positions all hold JDs.

David Hayes was nominated late last month to be Deputy Secretary, the number two position in the Department. Hayes, a graduate of Stanford Law School, was a partner at Latham and Watkins before becoming Deputy Secretary of Interior in the Clinton administration under Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. Both Hayes and Babbitt returned to Latham and Watkins after the end of Clinton's second term. Hayes left the firm at the end of 2008 to concentrate on his role as the Obama transition team's point person on energy and natural resources. Like several other Obama nominees, Hayes has been affiliated with the Center for American Progress. Readers who want to know more about his views should read some of this writings; he published fairly extensively both while he was in the Clinton administration and since. A partial publication list is here.

Update: The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing on the Hayes nomination on Thursday, March 12. The webcast can be viewed here (the hearing starts at about 22:35 on the webcast). The committee approved the nomination by a vote of 17-5 on March 18. Sen Robert Bennett (R-Utah) threatened to put a hold on the nomination until he gets more information on oil and gas leases recently pulled for review by the Obama administration. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) got Hayes to agree that the ESA is not well suited to deal with climate change.

Tom Strickland, who has been acting as Secretary Salazar's chief of staff since January, was nominated last week to be Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. That's the Interior official responsible for overseeing management of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. Strickland has served as U.S. Attorney for Colorado, managing partner of Hogan & Hartson, and most recently chief legal officer of United Health Group. His chief environmental credentials appear to be that he served with Salazar on the founding board of Great Outdoors Colorado, a state lottery-funded endowment for conservation and state parks; that he ran as an environmentalist in two unsuccessful campaigns for a Senate seat; and that he was involved as US Attorney in a water rights settlement covering the Rio Grande and Gunnison National Forests.

A hearing on the confirmation of Strickland is scheduled for March 24.

Finally, the President announced today that he intends to nominate Michael L. Connor to be Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation, the arm of Interior that operates federal irrigation projects. Connor is another old Clinton hand, having served as deputy director and then director of Interior's Indian Water Rights office. Since 2001, he has been counsel to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (one of the committees on which Salazar sat before his appointment as Interior Secretary).