David Nawi,
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of the Interior

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar has named a respected California environmental lawyer to serve in a key, newly-created Department of Interior post. Salazar appointed David Nawi as his Senior Advisor to the Secretary for California and Nevada.

In his announcement selecting Nawi, Secretary Salazar stated, "The current water crisis and land management challenges in our nation's most populous state, California, as well as the extensive Interior land resources in Nevada can be better served with an `on the ground' representative…who can serve as out `eyes and ears' in this important region."

Nawi's resume demonstrates that he's uniquely qualified for his new position: during the Clinton Administration, he was Regional Solicitor for DOI's Pacific Southwest Region for eight years. Nawi has also served with distinction in a variety of state and local government legal positions in California during his lengthy career: as Chief Counsel of the California Air Resources Board; member of the California Board of Forestry and Fire Protection; Deputy Attorney General litigating environmental cases for the California Attorney General's Office; and Santa Barbara County Counsel.

It will be most interesting to see how Secretary Salazar deploys Nawi. One can safely surmise that Nawi's first major assignment will be to serve as the Obama Administration's local point person on the seemingly-intractable issues of California water policy and supply. Several years of drought, the looming effects of climate change, heightened application of federal Endangered Species Act mandates, and continuing gridlock over California Delta policy all make the debate over California water policy more intractable than ever. The federal government is of course a critically-important player in that debate.

Let's hope David Nawi can hit the ground running, and lend his considerable experience and talents in pursuit of solutions to these and other natural resource controversies.