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## Mixed Reviews for Bush's Choice to Lead Fish and Wildlife Service

Allison A. Freeman, Greenwire reporter President Bush's choice to head the Fish and Wildlife Service -- a career employee who serves currently as its Southwest regional director -- is unpopular with environmentalists in his region.

Representatives from the Center for Biological Diversity and the Arizona Chapter of the Sierra Club said having H. Dale Hall as FWS director would mean trouble for wildlife. "This is not good news for threatened and endangered species, that is for sure," said Sandy Bahr, conservation outreach director for the Grand Canyon chapter of the Sierra Club. "I have not seen anything from Mr. Hall that would indicate that he considers that responsibility seriously."

But Hall's nomination was praised last week by at least one national environmental group as well as Interior Secretary Gale Norton and Senate Environment and Public Works Chairman James Inhofe (R-Okla). Hall would have to be confirmed by the Senate; Inhofe's panel would hold his confirmation hearing.

"He seems like a knowledgeable professional, who I think will give a fair hearing to suggestions from outside the agency for how to administer programs for the Fish and Wildlife Service, so he is someone we'll try to work with," said Michael Bean of the advocacy group Environmental Defense.

The Interior Department announced Bush's plans Friday to nominate Hall to take the FWS' helm from Matthew Hogan, who has been serving as acting director since Steve Williams stepped down in March. As director, Hall would oversee the 93 million-acre national wildlife refuge system, the national fish hatchery program and endangered species, migratory birds and wildlife habitat programs. Hall said in a statement last week he would seek "science-based, cooperative solutions" on agency issues.

Hall, who holds degrees in biology and fisheries science, has worked with FWS for 27 years. He first entered the service doing field work in wetlands ecology in Mississippi, and has worked in regional offices in Atlanta, Ga., Portland, Ore., and Albuquerque, N.M. He received employee awards from FWS under the Reagan and Clinton administrations.

Bahr said Hall has been unresponsive to requests for meetings with environmentalists, particularly on wolf recovery concerns. Hall's region decided earlier this year to impose a one-year moratorium on a program to release Mexican wolves into the wild, prompting kudos from ranchers but chagrin from environmental groups (Land Letter, May 12).

Kieran Suckling of the Center for Biological Diversity also criticized Hall's wolf decision, as well as his policy on the use of genetics in recovery plans.

In a memorandum earlier this year, Hall suggested limiting the ability of agency biologists to use new information about the genetics of endangered species when deciding how best to protect them. He said genetic information should only be used in creating recovery plans or considering whether a species qualifies for delisting if genetic issues were identified at the time of listing (Land Letter, May 26).

"He has routinely sided with extraction interests, refused to meet with or include environmentalists in decision-making and has undermined scientific standards at every turn," Suckling said.