

Official says Amazon dams on fast track

The Miami Herald
May. 03, 2007

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil --

The newly appointed chief of Brazil's environmental protection agency vowed Thursday to speed the approval of two hydroelectric dam projects in the Amazon rain forest.

The government argues the dams in the western Amazon are needed for Brazil to meet its growing energy needs, and President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has long complained about delays in granting licenses for the dams.

Environmentalists, however, say the dams will destroy a large swath of the rain forest and endanger rare fish.

"We're making an effort to do it (the dam licensing) as fast as possible," said Bazileu Alves Margarido Neto, who on Thursday was appointed acting-chief of the Ibama national environmental protection agency.

The appointment was widely seen as attempt by the government to speed licenses for dams and pipelines in the Amazon.

Last week, Brazil's environment minister created the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity - named after the rain-forest defender who was killed in 1988 - to oversee the country's 288 federal nature reserves, previously managed by Ibama.

Ibama will continue handling licensing for industrial and infrastructure projects and the enforcement of environmental laws.