

IN THE WATER COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA
LOWER MISSOURI DIVISION
BIG SANDY CREEK (BASIN 40H)

FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW FOR THE
INTERLOCUTORY DECREE OF BIG SANDY CREEK (BASIN 40H)

The Preliminary Decree for Big Sandy Creek (Basin 40H) was issued on January 22, 2003. Objections filed to claims in the Preliminary Decree have been addressed and resolved.

These Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law are issued for inclusion in the Interlocutory Decree for Big Sandy Creek (Basin 40H) as authorized by 3-7-224(2) and 85-2-231, MCA.

FINDINGS OF FACT

DESCRIPTION OF BASIN

1. Basin 40H encompasses Big Sandy Creek and its tributaries as well as groundwater located within Basin 40H. The boundaries of Basin 40H are outlined on the attached map. Although this Decree includes water rights within the hydrologic boundaries of Basin 40H, it does not include all the water rights in the Basin. The purpose of this Decree is to adjudicate water rights not included in the prior Decree in Basin 40H plus any outstanding issues from those prior proceedings.

DECREE ABSTRACTS AND INDEX

2. In addition to these Findings and Conclusions, this Decree consists of abstracts for the 34 claims included in this decree. Accompanying the Decree are six Indexes designed to facilitate research on water rights included in the Decree. The six Indexes are as follows:

- Water Right Claim Identification Number Index
- Owner Name Index
- Priority Date Index - Point of Diversion Index
- Source Name Index
- Issue Remark Index

3. CD copies of the Decree and six Indexes are located at the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Billings Regional Office, the DNRC Water Rights Adjudication Office in Helena, and the Montana Water Court in Bozeman. This information is also available on the DNRC's Water Rights Adjudication webpage.

UNRESOLVED FACTUAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

4. The objection period allows interested parties to raise issues regarding ONLY the water rights in this decree. Issues may also be raised by the Water Court on its own initiative. See Rule 8, W.R.Adj.R.

Unresolved factual and legal issues have been noted by issue remarks on claim abstracts. The Issue Remark Index combines the issue remarks into a list arranged numerically by water right claim number. Searching the Issue Remark Index by water right claim number will identify issue remarks on individual claim abstracts. Objections may be filed to claims with issue remarks. Issue remarks not resolved through the objection process will be resolved pursuant to section 85-2-248, MCA.

Water users within this Basin and other interested persons will be mailed a Notice of Entry of Preliminary Decree and Notice of Availability contemporaneously with the filing of these Findings and Conclusions. The Notice of Availability explains the objection process and sets a deadline for filing objections with the Water Court.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. This is a general adjudication of existing water rights. An existing water right is a right to the use of water which is protected under the law as it existed prior to July 1, 1973. Section 85-2-102(12), MCA.

2. Certain claims were exempt from the statement of claim filing process but could be voluntarily filed. Section 85-2-222, MCA (1979). These exempt rights were for stock or domestic uses from instream or groundwater sources. In 2013, the Montana Legislature created a process to file claims for existing water rights that were exempt from filing in the statewide water right adjudication. Section 85-2-222(2), MCA.

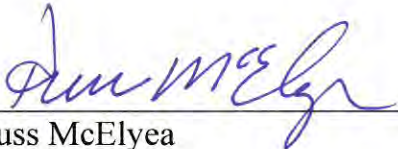
3. Certain claims in the decree are Interbasin Transfer claims which were not properly identified in the Preliminary Decree or were not included in the Preliminary Decree.

4. Some claims have missing elements. An issue remark identifying the element was added after issuance of the Preliminary Decree. These missing elements need to be determined and added to the abstracts of claims.

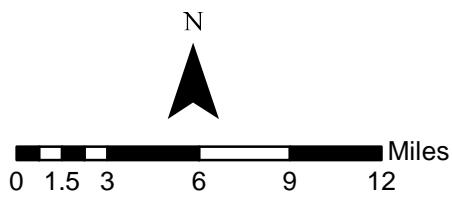
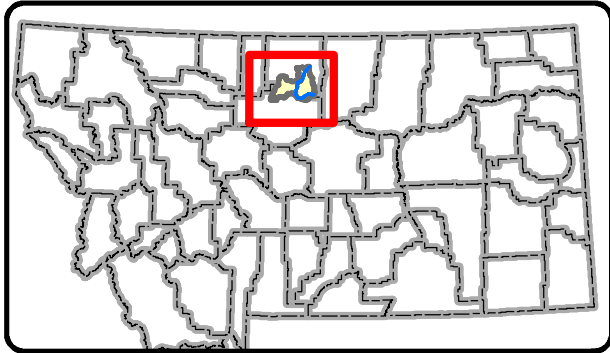
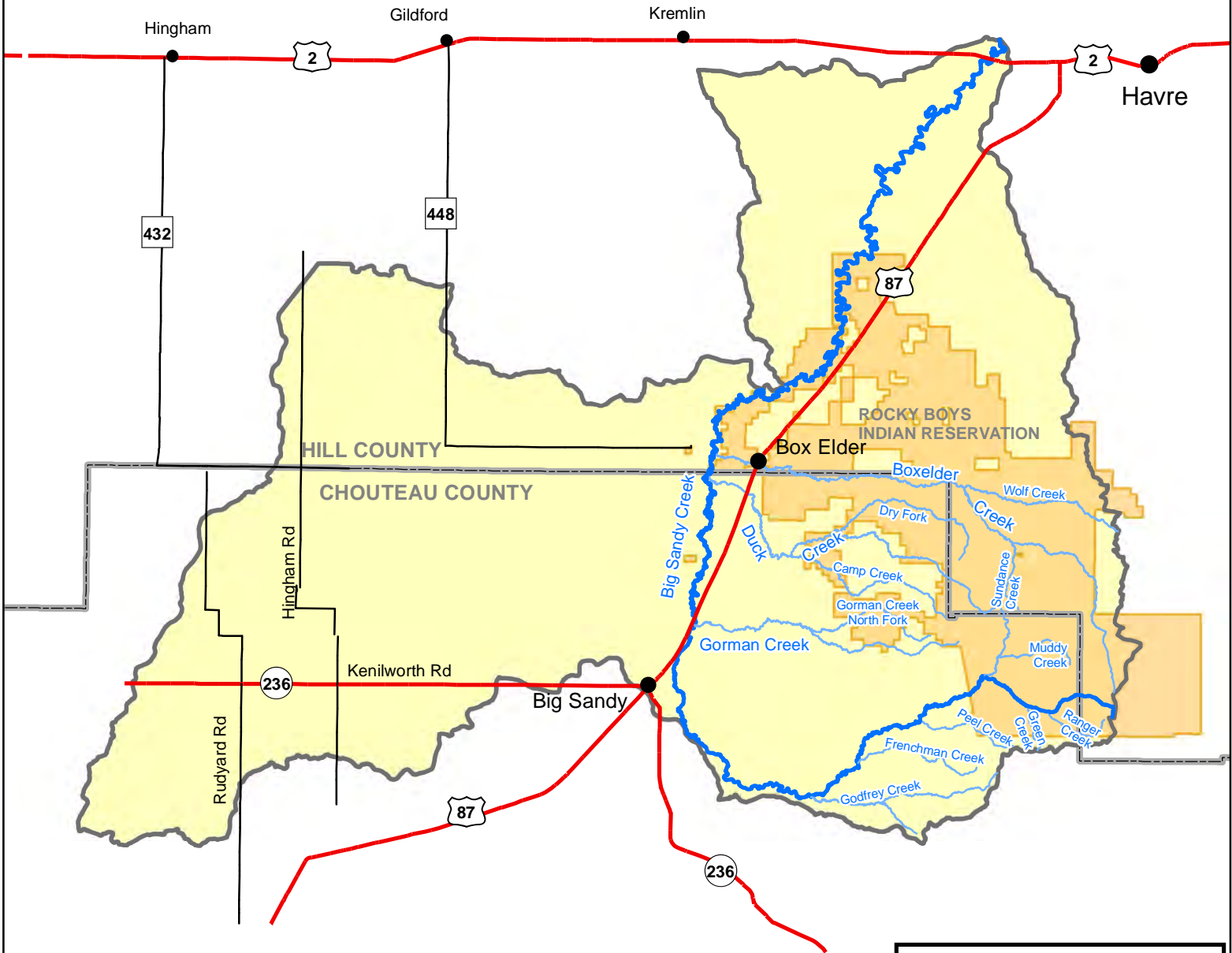
5. The Montana Water Court has jurisdiction to enter an Interlocutory Decree for the Big Sandy Creek (Basin 40H) pursuant to Title 85, Chapter 2, Montana Code Annotated. *Arizona v. San Carlos Apache Tribe*, 463 U.S. 545, 103 S.Ct. 3201, 77 L.Ed.2d 837 (1983); *State ex rel. Greeley v. Conf Salish & Kootenai Tribes*, 219 Mont. 76, 712 P.2d 754 (1985).

6. These Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and abstracts define these 34 existing water rights under Montana law in Basin 40H and comprise an Interlocutory Decree in accordance with 85-2-231, MCA, and Rule 4, W.R.Adj.R.

DATED this 17th day of June, 2020.


Russ McElyea
Chief Water Judge

Basin 40H Big Sandy Creek



Waterways	
	Streams
	Big Sandy Creek
Major Roads	
	Primary
	Secondary
	County
	Basin 40N Boundary
	Reservation