

Montana Water Court
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FILED
MAR 29 2018
Montana Water Court

IN THE WATER COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA
UPPER MISSOURI RIVER DIVISION
WILLOW CREEK (BASIN 41N)

**FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW FOR THE
PRELIMINARY DECREE OF WILLOW CREEK (BASIN 41N)**

The Preliminary Decree for Willow Creek (Basin 41N) was issued on July 6, 1984.

Since issuance of the Preliminary Decree, there have been statewide changes in how claims for fish and wildlife, wildlife, and recreation purposes are examined and decreed. There have also been statewide changes in how certain elements are decreed, such as standardization of source names and point of diversion legal descriptions. Some additional information has been added to the abstracts of claims such as ditch names, reservoir data, and periods of diversion. These changes have been incorporated on many of the abstracts in this Preliminary Decree. These changes have all been authorized by Montana Water Court Orders. *See* Amended Order on Period of Diversion – Statewide, entered December 11, 2008; Second Amended Order on Period of Diversion – Statewide, entered November 10, 2014; Order Addressing ReExamination, entered December 14, 2012; and Supplemental Order Regarding Fish and Wildlife, Wildlife, and Recreation Claims - Statewide 2013, entered April 17, 2013.

These Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law are issued by the Chief Water Judge for inclusion in the Preliminary Decree for Willow Creek (Basin 41N) as authorized by §§ 3-7-224(2) and 85-2-231, MCA. These Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law supersede and replace the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law

for the Preliminary Decree filed by Water Master Timothy J. Sullivan and adopted by Lower Missouri Division Water Judge Bernard W. Thomas on June 29, 1984.

FINDINGS OF FACT

DESCRIPTION OF BASIN

1. Basin 41N encompasses Willow Creek and its tributaries as well as groundwater located within Basin 41N. The boundaries of Basin 41N are outlined on the attached map.

DECREE ABSTRACTS AND INDEX

2. In addition to these Findings and Conclusions, this Decree consists of a computer CD of the abstracts of each individual water right claim decreed in this basin. Accompanying the Decree are six Indexes designed to help people research and find 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) Havre 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 provides an opportunity for interested parties to raise issues regarding their own water rights or other water rights in this decree. Issues may also be raised by the Water Court on its own initiative ("on its own motion"). See Rule 8, W.R.Adj.R.

Many unresolved factual and legal issues have been noted by issue remarks on the individual claim abstracts. The Issue Remark Index combines the issue remarks into one index arranged numerically by water right claim number. Searching the Issue Remark Index by water right claim number will identify all 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 as directed by § 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

Based on the above Findings of Fact, the Chief Water Judge makes the following 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.

2. Certain claims were exempt from the statement of claim filing process but could be voluntarily filed. § 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. § 85-2-222, MCA. A person who claims an exempt right must file for the right no later than June 30, 2019. § 85-2-222(2)(a), MCA

3. Claims for water rights reserved under the laws of the United States of America are included in the Montana general adjudication of water rights. The State of Montana, through the Reserved Water Rights Compact Commission, engaged in the negotiation of reserved water right compacts with the federal government and Indian Tribes. §§ 85-2-701 through 85-2-708, MCA.

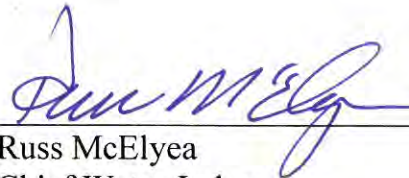
4. There may be federal or Tribal reserved rights in this basin that are not reflected in this decree. Those rights will be issued in a separate decree.

5. The Montana Water Court has jurisdiction to enter a Preliminary Decree for Willow Creek (Basin 41N) 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

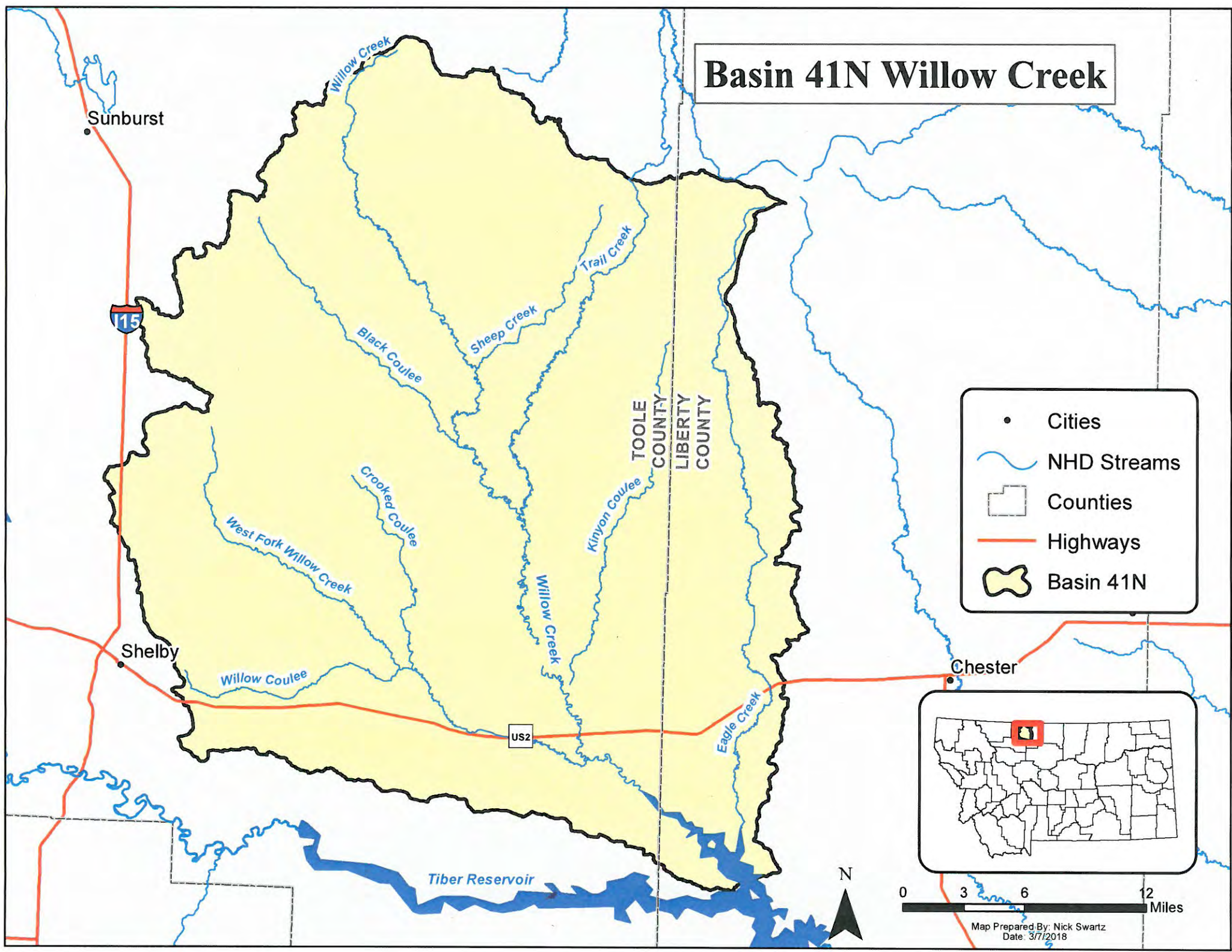
(1983); *State ex rel. Greely v. Conf. Salish & Kootenai Tribes*, 219 Mont. 76, 712 P.2d 754 (1985).

6. These Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law, and abstracts define the nature and extent of each claimed existing water right under Montana law in Basin 41N and comprise a Preliminary Decree in accordance with § 85-2-231, MCA, and Rule 4, W.R.Adj.R.

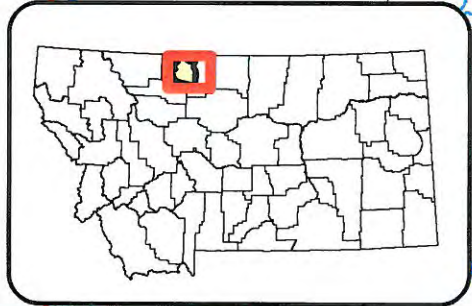
DATED this 29th day of March 2018.


Russ McElyea
Chief Water Judge

Basin 41N Willow Creek



- Cities
- ~ NHD Streams
- Counties
- Highways
- Basin 41N



0 3 6 12 Miles

Map Prepared By: Nick Swartz
Date: 3/7/2018