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IN THE WATER COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTAN
YELLOWSTONE DIVISION
TONGUE RIVER ABOVE AND INCLUDING HANGING WOMAN CREEK - BASIN 42B
and
TONGUE RIVER BELOW HANGING WOMAN CREEK - BASIN 42C

United States of America
General Objections to Basin 42B and 42C
Preliminary Decrees

CASE 42B-1

**BRIEF AMICUS CURIAE OF THE APSAALOOKE (CROW) TRIBE IN SUPPORT OF
THE UNITED STATES**

1. Because of the protections set forth for State Based Water Rights in the Crow Compact, the elimination of any and all partially or fully abandoned water right claims from the Final Decrees of each Water Court Basin is of vital importance to the Crow Tribe.

The Crow Compact provides very specific protections for State Law water rights within the various drainages of the Crow Indian Reservation and the Ceded Strip. Because of those protections of State Law based water rights set forth in the Crow Compact, it is vitally important that all water right claims in the Basins affected by the Compact be accurately adjudicated. Of the utmost importance, is elimination of claims that have been partially or fully abandoned.

Article III of the Crow Compact quantifies the amount of water that is allocated as part of the Tribal Water Right. It is divided into six sections, Sections A-F, with each section quantifying the amount of the Tribal Water Right by drainage area. Each section provides for two significant concessions made by the Crow Tribe. The pertinent language for sections A-F of Article III of the Crow Compact is as follows:

6. Protection of Water Rights Recognized Under State Law.

a. Except as provided in Section G.2., of Article III, water rights Recognized Under State Law in the [Basin Name] River Basin with a priority date before this Compact has been ratified by the Montana legislature or excepted rights that are provided in Section D.1., of Article IV, are protected from:

(1). an assertion of senior priority in the exercise of current uses of the Tribal Water Right developed as of the date this Compact has been ratified by the Montana legislature.

(2). new development of the Tribal Water Right after the date this Compact has been ratified by the Montana legislature. New development of the Tribal Water Right shall be exercised as junior in priority to water rights Recognized Under State Law in the [Basin Name] Basin with a priority date before this Compact has been ratified by the Montana legislature or excepted rights that are provided in Section D.1., of Article IV.

b. The protection of water rights Recognized Under State Law set forth in Sections [A.6.a.(1). and (2)] of Article III extends to: valid existing water rights as decreed or to be decreed by the Montana Water Court pursuant to 85-2-234, MCA; (emphasis added)

In addition, Section A. 4. of Article IV of the Crow Compact states that:

4. Distribution of Water Between the Parties. When water availability is insufficient to satisfy all water rights under the Tribal Water Right and all water rights Recognized Under State Law within the Reservation, administration and distribution shall be as follows:

a. distribution between the water administered by the Tribe and the United States for current uses of the Tribal Water Right within the Reservation developed as of the date this Compact has been ratified by the Montana legislature and the water for water rights Recognized Under State Law within the Reservation with a priority date before this Compact has been ratified by the Montana legislature shall be on an equitable basis in proportion to the amount of water required for Tribal water use as listed pursuant to Section E.2., of Article IV, and the amount of water required for water rights Recognized Under State Law, provided that, the Parties recognize that distribution may

not be on a precise proportional basis due to the need to take into account the physical constraints of water delivery.

The practical application of the above cited provisions of the Crow Compact means that in order for water to be divided on a pro-rata basis in times of shortage, and in order to determine if any new developments of the Tribal Water Right will adversely affect existing State Law based water rights, only valid existing State Law water rights should be counted when applying these two key provisions of the Crow Compact. The inclusion of water rights that have not been utilized for an extended period of time would create unjust results in the distribution of water in times of shortage and unjust results in the determination of whether or not new developments of the Tribal Water Right will adversely impact State Law based water rights. Such unjust results are contrary to the intent of the settling parties to the Crow Compact, the State, the Tribe, and the United States.

2. Before the Water Court can Adjudicate abandonment issues, the issue of prolonged or extended non-use of a particular water right must be identified by the DNRC claims examination process.

Counsel for the Crow Tribe firmly believes that the Montana Water Court will adjudicate all issues of abandonment of water rights, both pre and post June 30, 1973, if and when these issues are brought to the attention of the Court. Montana Code Annotated 85-2-227 (2) and (3) state as follows:

(2) A water judge may consider all relevant evidence in the determination and interpretation of existing water rights. Relevant evidence under this part may include admissible evidence arising before or after July 1, 1973.

(3) Subject to the provisions of subsection (4), a water judge may determine all or part of an existing water right to be abandoned based on a consideration of all admissible evidence that is relevant, including, without limitation, *evidence relating to acts or intent occurring in whole or in part after July 1, 1973.*

Based on the foregoing, this Amicus Brief will focus its arguments on the examination process, and the reasons why counsel for the Crow Tribe believes the DNRC claims examination process should focus more time and energy on issues relating to post June 30, 1973 abandonment, by examining each claim for extended periods of non-use of a particular water right. It is imperative that the DNRC claims examiners utilize all available resources, including the most recent aerial photos to identify potential factual and/or legal issues.

3. Specific examples of prolonged periods of non-use of water rights within the Pryor Creek and Little Bighorn River Basins.

Counsel for the Crow Tribe has spent much of the past two years actively involved in the adjudication process of water rights claims that the Crow Tribe objected to in the Pryor Creek and Little Bighorn River Basins (43O and 43E), and has observed numerous instances of extended periods of non-use for certain water right claims. In these basins, the DNRC routinely only reviewed two data sources in their claims examination process, (i.e. a 1966 aerial photograph and a 1979 aerial photograph). It turns out that the Crow Tribe has already prevented several abandoned claims from being erroneously included in the final decrees and continues to pursue several pending claims for abandonment. Unfortunately, under the present claims examination process, the only way for the Crow Tribe to be certain that abandoned claims are not included in the final decrees, is to file objections against virtually every claim in each of the remaining unadjudicated basins, especially those claims involving irrigation. This premise has proven to be correct on numerous occasions. The following are a few examples of claims that the DNRC did not identify a single factual or legal issue that would have indicated the water rights could potentially be abandoned:

Claim Number 43E 201089-00: This water right claim had the following DNRC issue remark: *"No review or determination of the claimed type of historical right has been*

made. Additional evidence may be required before this claim can be decreed.”

The Crow Tribe’s water right technical expert, William Bishop of Black Otter Water Resources, LLC, initially conducted a desk top review of this claim. Mr. Bishop utilized all aerial photographs available to him, not just the aerial photographs used by the DNRC. Based on his desk top review, Mr. Bishop determined that a portion of the conveyance system no longer existed, that the means of diversion (headgate) no longer existed, and that at least 50 years (40 years post 1973) had passed since this water right was last put to beneficial use. Remarkably, the DNRC placed no issue remarks regarding these problems with the claim. Because it appeared to Mr. Bishop that there were potential abandonment issues regarding this claim, the Crow Tribe objected to all elements of this claim.

Following the initial status conference for water court case 43E-19, the Claimants agreed to allow the Objectors to conduct a site visit of their water right claims, which included claim number 43E 201089-00. During the course of the interview with the Claimants, they readily acknowledged that they have not irrigated the lands described in the above mentioned water right claim since 1961. In addition, they explained that the private irrigation ditch that conveyed water to their claimed place of use was plowed under by a neighbor who had leased the land several years earlier. The Claimants agreed to withdraw their statement of claim for water right claim number 43E 201089-00, which was a claim to irrigate 25 acres within the boundaries of the Crow Indian Reservation.

Claim Number 43E 201142-00: This water right claim had the following DNRC issue remark: *“No review or determination of the claimed type of historical right has been made. Additional evidence may be required before this claim can be decreed.”*

Mr. Bishop’s initial desktop review of Claim Number 43E 201142 00 lead him to

conclude that no diversion structure or conveyance system existed for this water right, and that this water right had either never been perfected, or in the alternative, that if the water right had been perfected, it has been abandoned for several decades. Mr. Bishop could not identify a diversion structure or an irrigation ditch in any of the aerial photographs he reviewed, which included aerial photographs from 1966, 1979, 1996, 2009 and 2011. Thus, Mr. Bishop identified the potential of non-use for nearly 13 years prior to 1973 and at least 38 years after 1973. Here again, the DNRC did not place issue remarks on the abstract regarding the fact that no means of diversion existed, no conveyance system existed, and that it appeared there had been no irrigation on the claimed place of use for an extended period of time.

During the site visit, the claimants explained that since the time they purchased the property, no irrigation has occurred on the claimed place of use. The Claimants further stated that they have no historical knowledge of when irrigation on the claimed place of use may have occurred in the past.

Based on the information obtained from Mr. Bishop's desk top review and the interview/site visit with the Claimants, they agreed to withdraw Water Right Claim Number 43E 201142 00, which was a claim to irrigate 40 acres within the boundaries of the Crow Indian Reservation.

Water Right Claim Number 43E 20199-00: This water right claim was withdrawn by the claimant pursuant to Stipulation under very similar circumstances as those explained in more detail in the two previous examples. This claim was an irrigation claim to irrigate 61 acres within the boundaries of the Crow Indian Reservation.

Counsel for the Crow Tribe has personal knowledge of numerous additional claims in Basins 43E and 43O where no issue remarks regarding extended periods of non-use were placed

on the abstracts, nor were any issue remarks placed on the abstracts regarding the present conditions of the diversion structures and the conveyance systems. For these claims, Mr. Bishop's desk top reviews and the subsequent site visits clearly demonstrated extended periods of non-use post June 30, 1973. These claims are still pending before the Water Court and the details of them should not be disclosed at this time, but will be over time as settlements are filed or litigation commences.

4. The DNRC should be exercising additional efforts to identify potential factual issues regarding extended periods of non-use post June 30, 1973.

Two definitions contained in the Water Rights Claims Examination Manual for "Abstract," and for "Adjudication," when considered in conjunction with each other, indicate that the DNRC should be actively reviewing every statement of claim for post June 30, 1973 abandonment issues. The definitions are as follows:

"Abstract" means the computer printout of each claim of an existing water right showing the information submitted on the original or amended statement of claim, any changes authorized by the Montana Supreme Court Water Right Claim Examination Rules (W.R.C.E.R) or by the Water Court, remarks noting any obvious factual or legal issues presented by the claim, and other remarks explaining the nature and extent of the claimed water right.

"Adjudication" means the judicial determination of water rights that existed prior to July 1, 1973, including the total or partial abandonment of existing water rights occurring at any time before the entry of the final decree

W.R.C.E.M. Sec. II Definitions, p. 33 (July 2009, (updated May 2011))

The Water Rights Claims Examination manual also provides an express narrow window of opportunity for the DNRC claim examiners to examine post-1980 data sources that identify issues the "speak[s] to extended non-use," to wit:

Two data sources may not always be available for certain areas or for claims with priority dates nearing 1973. Bring such claims to the attention of a supervisor. Every attempt will be made to find a second data source, preferably pre-1980. If a second data source exist that

is post-1980, it will generally not be used for identifying issues (unless it speaks to extended non-use). The post-1980 data source can be used to document the examiner's analysis.

W.R.C.E.M. Sec. VII D. 2. b., p. 425 (May 2011)

Based on the foregoing cited definitions and excerpt from the W.R.C.E.M., it seems that the DNRC's own manual requires it to consider all relevant available information regarding extended periods of non-use post June 30, 1973. Failing to do so will result in "Abstracts" that are missing "remarks noting any obvious factual or legal issues presented by the claim." Counsel for the Crow Tribe notes that the DNRC's water right's query system currently utilizes 2011 aerial photographs to identify water right claims. Anyone with knowledge of how to use the query system can easily upload a 2011 aerial photo for any given water right. Since the DNRC already utilizes the 2011 aerial photographs to identify water right claims, it should also be examining those same aerial photographs to determine whether or not issues relating to extended periods of non-use, post June 30, 1973, are present.

In addition to instructing the claim examiners to review post 1980 aerial photographs, the W.R.C.E.M. repeatedly instructs the examiner to contact the claimant and document the contact whenever discrepancies arise. If contact with the claimant is made, any statements made by the claimant indicating the last time the claim was used, the fact that the diversion structure no longer exists, that the conveyance system is not functional, that they no longer irrigate etc., should be added to the Abstract as an issue remark. Issue remarks addressing potential abandonment issues will have a tremendous bearing on whether or not the Crow Tribe files objections against future claims as they move through the adjudication process. With nine water court basins under adjudication activity, and the preliminary Compact decree, the time and expense to the Crow Tribe, let alone an individual tribal or non-tribal member, to adequately

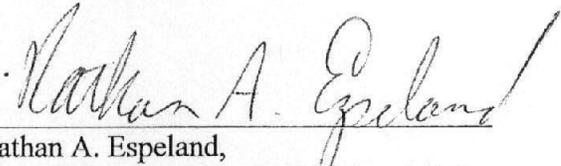
investigate non-use creates an unfair and unjust burden on them. Without the proper assistance from the DNRC, the Crow Tribe, tribal members and other non tribal members, will very likely unknowingly allow abandoned water right claims to be entered into the final decrees as valid existing State Law water rights, which will ultimately impair the purpose and intent of the entire adjudication process and the provisions of the Crow Compact that provide protection to State Law water rights.

CONCLUSION

As explained above, the issue of post June 30, 1973 abandonment of water rights for the Montana Water Court Basins that touch and concern the Crow Indian Reservation have serious impacts on the effectiveness and implementation of the Crow Compact because of the protections placed in the Compact for State Law Based Water Rights. Because the DNRC has and apparently continues to fail to adequately identify factual issues that could ultimately lead to findings that certain claims have been abandoned, the Crow Tribe will likely need to investigate every claim in future preliminary decrees affecting the Crow Indian Reservation for post 1973 abandonment, which places an unfair and unjust burden upon it. The practical result forces the Crow Tribe to expend significant resources to "re-examine" every claim in each preliminary decree. The Crow Tribe in essence, will be doing the job that the DNRC is intended to do. If, in the future, the DNRC is required to review additional data sources to determine whether or not extended periods of non-use have occurred for a particular claim post June 30, 1973, and if issue remarks to that affect are added to the Abstracts of those claims, the Crow Tribe could more readily rely on the fact that the DNRC has conducted an adequate examination of issues pertaining to post June 30, 1973 extended periods of non-use, and could potentially narrow the scope and number of objections filed in the adjudication process, while at the same time, protect

the Crow Tribe's water rights set forth in the Crow Compact. For the foregoing reasons, this Court should Grant the United States' Motion for Order Requiring the DNRC to examine for post-June 30, 1973 non-use and the United States Motion for the Water Court to Adjudicate Post-June 30, 1973 Abandonment in the Montana Adjudication.

DATED this 20th day of December, 2013.


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I certify that a copy of the foregoing was served by first class mail on each of the parties set forth below this 20th day of December, 2013.

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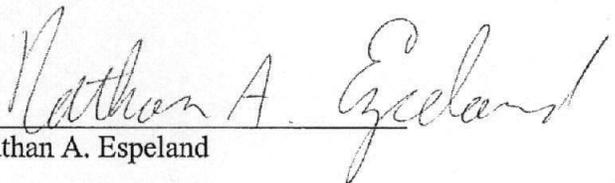
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