

IN THE WATER COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA
CLARK FORK DIVISION
CLARK FORK RIVER BELOW THE FLATHEAD RIVER BASIN (76N)
PRELIMINARY DECREE

CLAIMANTS: C. Wayne Cole; Norma J. Cole

76N-0067-R-2025
76N 30126681
76N 30126682

NOTICE OF FILING OF MASTER'S REPORT

This Master's Report was filed with the Montana Water Court on the above stamped date. Please review this report carefully.

You may file a written objection to this Master's Report within **10 days** of the stamped date if you disagree or find errors with the Master's findings of fact, conclusions of law, or recommendations. Rule 23, W.R.Adj.R. If the Master's Report was mailed to you, the Montana Rules of Civil Procedure allow an additional 3 days be added to the 10-day objection period. Rule 6(d), M.R.Civ.P. If you file an objection, you must serve a copy of the objection to all parties on the service list found at the end of the Master's Report. The original objection and a certificate of mailing to all parties on the service list must be filed with the Water Court.

If you do not file a timely objection, the Water Court will conclude that you agree with the content of this Master's Report.

MASTER'S REPORT

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Claims 76N 30126681 and 76N 30126682 are stock claims owned by C. Wayne Cole and Norma J. Cole. The claims appeared in the 76N Preliminary Decree with issue remarks. They did not receive objections during the 76N Preliminary Decree objection period.

2. Both claims received an issue remark stating that “the priority date is missing.” The issue remarks were added because no priority date was claimed on the statement of claim forms and no evidence was provided to support a priority date prior to July 1, 1973. Priority date is an essential element of a water right. If a water right was not put to use prior to July 1, 1973, it is not considered an existing water right subject to the adjudication.

3. On February 18, 2025, the claimants filed an affidavit stating that the priority date for both claims should be June 1942. In support, Vera Cole declared that she has been alive and viewed stock use on the property since her parents acquired it in the early 1940s. Based on the evidence before the Court, the priority date for claims 76N 30126681 and 76N 30126682 should be June 30, 1942 and the issue remarks should be removed.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. A properly filed Statement of Claim for Existing Water Right is prima facie proof of its content. § 85-2-227, MCA. This prima facie proof may be contradicted and overcome by other evidence that proves, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the elements of the claim do not accurately reflect the beneficial use of the water right as it existed prior to July 1, 1973. This is the burden of proof for every assertion that a claim is incorrect. Rule 19, W.R.Adj.R.

2. Section 85-2-248(2), MCA requires the Water Court to resolve all issue remarks that are not resolved through the objection process. The Montana Water Court has the authority to resolve issue remarks when the claim file and information available to the Court provide a sufficient basis to do so. § 85-2-248(3), MCA. The issue remarks on claims 76N 30126681 and 76N 30126682 were placed on the claims because no

priority date was claimed on the statement of claim form. The claimants provided sufficient evidence of first use to resolve the issue remarks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The issue remarks should be removed from claims 76N 30126681 and 76N 30126682.

2. The priority date for claims 76N 30126681 and 76N 30126682 should be June 30, 1942.

Post Decree Abstracts of Water Right Claims are served with the Report to confirm that the recommended modifications have been made in the state's centralized record system.

ELECTRONICALLY SIGNED AND DATED BELOW.

Service via USPS Mail:

C. Wayne Cole
Norma J. Cole
PO Box 298
Plains, MT 59859

**POST DECREE
ABSTRACT OF WATER RIGHT CLAIM
CLARK FORK, BELOW FLATHEAD RIVER
BASIN 76N**

Water Right Number: 76N 30126681 STATEMENT OF CLAIM

Version: 2 -- POST DECREE

Status: ACTIVE

Owners: C WAYNE COLE
PO BOX 298
PLAINS, MT 59859

NORMA J COLE
PO BOX 298
PLAINS, MT 59859-0298

Priority Date: JUNE 30, 1942

Type of Historical Right: USE

Purpose (Use): STOCK

***Flow Rate:** A SPECIFIC FLOW RATE HAS NOT BEEN DECREED BECAUSE THIS USE CONSISTS OF STOCK DRINKING DIRECTLY FROM THE SOURCE, OR FROM A DITCH SYSTEM. THE FLOW RATE IS LIMITED TO THE MINIMUM AMOUNT HISTORICALLY NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN THIS PURPOSE.

***Volume:** THIS RIGHT INCLUDES THE AMOUNT OF WATER CONSUMPTIVELY USED FOR STOCKWATERING PURPOSES AT THE RATE OF 30 GALLONS PER DAY PER ANIMAL UNIT. ANIMAL UNITS SHALL BE BASED ON REASONABLE CARRYING CAPACITY AND HISTORICAL USE OF THE AREA SERVICED BY THIS WATER SOURCE.

Source Name: CLARK FORK

Source Type: SURFACE WATER

***Point of Diversion and Means of Diversion:**

<u>ID</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1	4	S2NW	33	20N	26W	SANDERS

Period of Diversion: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Diversion Means: LIVESTOCK DIRECT FROM SOURCE

Period of Use: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

***Place of Use:**

<u>ID</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1		4	S2NW	33	20N	26W	SANDERS

**POST DECREE
ABSTRACT OF WATER RIGHT CLAIM
CLARK FORK, BELOW FLATHEAD RIVER
BASIN 76N**

Water Right Number: 76N 30126682 STATEMENT OF CLAIM

Version: 2 -- POST DECREE

Status: ACTIVE

Owners: C WAYNE COLE
PO BOX 298
PLAINS, MT 59859

NORMA J COLE
PO BOX 298
PLAINS, MT 59859-0298

Priority Date: JUNE 30, 1942

Type of Historical Right: USE

Purpose (Use): STOCK

***Flow Rate:** A SPECIFIC FLOW RATE HAS NOT BEEN DECREED BECAUSE THIS USE CONSISTS OF STOCK DRINKING DIRECTLY FROM THE SOURCE, OR FROM A DITCH SYSTEM. THE FLOW RATE IS LIMITED TO THE MINIMUM AMOUNT HISTORICALLY NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN THIS PURPOSE.

***Volume:** THIS RIGHT INCLUDES THE AMOUNT OF WATER CONSUMPTIVELY USED FOR STOCKWATERING PURPOSES AT THE RATE OF 30 GALLONS PER DAY PER ANIMAL UNIT. ANIMAL UNITS SHALL BE BASED ON REASONABLE CARRYING CAPACITY AND HISTORICAL USE OF THE AREA SERVICED BY THIS WATER SOURCE.

Source Name: COMBEST CREEK

Source Type: SURFACE WATER

***Point of Diversion and Means of Diversion:**

<u>ID</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1	4	SWNW	33	20N	26W	SANDERS

Period of Diversion: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Diversion Means: LIVESTOCK DIRECT FROM SOURCE

2		N2NWSE	33	20N	26W	SANDERS
---	--	--------	----	-----	-----	---------

Period of Diversion: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

Diversion Means: LIVESTOCK DIRECT FROM SOURCE

Period of Use: JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31

***Place of Use:**

<u>ID</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Govt Lot</u>	<u>Qtr Sec</u>	<u>Sec</u>	<u>Twp</u>	<u>Rge</u>	<u>County</u>
1		4	SWNW	33	20N	26W	SANDERS
2			N2NWSE	33	20N	26W	SANDERS