



COLLINS LAW PLLC

January 10, 2025

Sent via Email Only to: <rbird@mt.gov>

Chief Justice Cory Swanson
c/o Rob Bird
Office of Court Administrator
P.O. Box 203005
Helena, MT 59620-3005

Re: Water Court Chief Water Judge Vacancy—Public Comment in Support of Applicant
Julia Nordlund

Dear Chief Justice Swanson,

I write in support of applicant Julia (Julie) Nordlund for the Water Court Associate Water Judge vacancy position. As a former Montana Supreme Court Law Clerk, a former Water Master at the Montana Water Court, and now a private practitioner I am familiar with the qualities necessary that make a “good judge.” It is my belief that Senior Water Master Julia Nordlund has the experience, temperament, integrity, intelligence, and knowledge that are required to be successful in this role. I note that you have a fine selection of candidates to choose from and I do not envy your tough decision ahead. Montana will be well-served by the appointment any of the candidates; but, after review of all candidates, I provide my support to those who have a distinct edge for the reasons that follow.

I first met and know Julie from our years as law students, as colleagues at the Water Court, and as friends. Julie and I began our careers at the Water Court at the same time. From the start, though we worked independently, I was able to rely on Julie as a source of guidance as we navigated our new roles. Through the years working aside each other she was a steady sounding board for me to address complex needs of a given case. Even as peers, I valued her advice and perspective.

In her role as Senior Water Master she has always willingly taken on additional responsibility. She has been an ambassador of the Water Court to present information to stakeholder groups on multiple occasions, become a source of support for water commissioners appointed by district court judges, performed essential tasks for the district courts, and served as a mediator for water cases. She understands the complexities of water law and the need for thorough legal research and fact-finding to reach a decision. She has experience as a private practitioner and as a judicial officer so is aware of the need for timely decision-making so that water users can move forward with their lives. Importantly, Julie has lived the life of an agricultural water user and understands first-hand the intricacies of water use in arid Montana as a generational farmer-rancher. This is a distinct perspective that sets her apart from most.

Beyond the knowledge required to be a judge, Julie possesses the appropriate demeanor for a judge. She is calm, thoughtful, thorough, poised, and demonstrates confidence in her decisions.

She is also kind, approachable, and is respectful to others. She is willing to listen and consider all points of view. She also has a wonderful sense of humor, which I find is an unsung important quality in a leadership role. She is truly a well-rounded candidate for this position.

As mentioned, while the candidates who have applied for this position are all of undoubted quality, I note Julie's importance to the Water Court in general. The Water Court performs an essential role for the State of Montana and the area of law is complex. It is a unique judicial institution that interacts with a state agency and pro se litigants differently than any other court in the State. As Julie's résumé shows she has dedicated her career thus far to the mastery of water law, and specifically at the Water Court. By allowing Julie to advance in her career from Senior Water Master to Associate Water Judge we all would benefit by the retention of her institutional knowledge and her commitment to public service.

In sum, I do not hesitate to support Julie in appointment as Associate Water Judge. If you should have any questions in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience. Your attention to this matter is appreciated.

Sincerely,
COLLINS LAW PLLC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrea Collins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "C".

[electronically signed]
Andrea Collins