

C. BRUCE LOBLE

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January 7, 2025

Hon. Cory Swanson, Chief Justice
Montana Supreme Court
c/o rbird@mt.gov
Via E-mail Only

Re: Associate Water Judge – Anna M. Stradley – Letter of Recommendation

Dear Chief Justice Swanson:

I had the honor of being Montana's Chief Water Judge for 23 years - from 1990 to 2013. I hired Anna Stradley as a law clerk on January 4, 2006 -19 years ago. Two years later, I promoted her to a Water Master position. In 2013, Anna was promoted again to her current Senior Water Master position. She is the second longest serving Senior Water Master in the Water Court's 45-year history. She has an agricultural background and understands the difficulties the water adjudication effort can impose on Montana's farm and ranch communities.

I recommend and encourage you to appoint Anna M. Stradley as the next Associate Water Judge.

The Water Masters perform every water adjudication task which district judges performed for 100 years prior to the creation of the Water Court. The Water Masters hold scheduling conferences, set discovery deadlines, resolve discovery disputes, rule on summary judgments, preside over water right trials, rule on trial objections, and issue decisions.

When individuals are doing their job well and everything is going smoothly, most other people do not notice the effort that goes into stellar performance. It is easy to overlook the casual competence of extremely well-trained and very experienced personnel. Anna is one of these extremely competent individuals. She is a very experienced and levelheaded judge.

Anna has been immersed in and adjudicating water rights for 19 years and is starting her 20th year of service. She has far more Water Court experience than any of the other applicants. Anna has almost as much Water Court experience adjudicating water rights as I had when I retired from the Chief Water Judge position after 23 years. By experience and temperament, she will make an excellent water judge. If selected, she would face no learning curve and there would be no delay in accepting her new responsibilities. On the effective date of her appointment, the signature line on the documents she signs would simply change to reflect her new title.

Many people do not understand the uniqueness of the Water Court. It is a specialized court with specialized Water Right Adjudication Rules. The Rules of Civil Procedure and Evidence are

Hon. Cory Swanson
January 7, 2025
Page 2

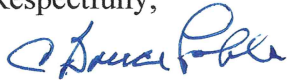
applicable, of course, but the Water Court, for example, is the only Montana court that is authorized to allow family farm corporations and other organizations to appear without attorney representation up to and until the issuance of a hearing track order. See Rule 33, W.R.Adj.R.

Self-represented litigants can often be confused about unfamiliar legal procedures and their confusion and hesitancy can slow proceedings down while they navigate a tentative way through the adjudication system. Anna has an excellent ability to work with these self-represented water users in a way that keeps their cases moving toward the goal line.

I support Anna Stradley's application for the Associate Water Judge position and I encourage you to appoint Anna M. Stradley to this position.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Bruce Loble". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

C. Bruce Loble