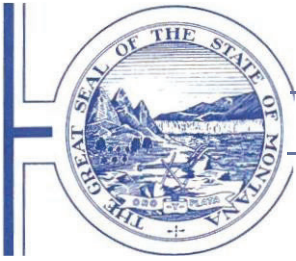


# MONTANA WATERCOURT



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## STATE OF MONTANA

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February 14, 2025

Chief Justice Cory Swanson  
Montana Supreme Court  
215 N. Sanders Street  
Helena, MT 59601

[Via email c/o rbird@mt.gov](mailto:rbird@mt.gov)

Re: Application for Chief Water Judge Reappointment

Chief Justice Swanson:

Please accept this letter and the enclosed resume as my application for reappointment to the position of Chief Water Judge of the Montana Water Court. I seek reappointment because I believe deeply in the importance of the Water Court's service to Montana and its citizens.

Montana's water rights adjudication may be the most extensive water rights proceeding ever conducted. No other state has attempted to integrate surface water, groundwater, state-based rights, and federal and tribal reserved rights into one comprehensive state-wide adjudication, especially in a state as hydrologically complex as Montana. The work is vast, but critically important. The Montana process recognizes that a fair and accurate adjudication creates property rights certainty. It centralizes a consistent set of records that allows water users and managers to predictably plan their operations. It clarifies water distribution and sets a baseline for future changes and permits. A completed comprehensive adjudication also may help protect Montana's water use in potential future interstate water allocation disputes that are becoming increasingly common throughout the West. I am committed to ensuring the Water Court remains on a path to achieve these important objectives in a manner that provides a fair process for participants to protect their rights and interests.

I enclose my resume which highlights some of the cases and issues I have had the privilege to address during my six years with the Court. In addition to the day-to-day case work, I also work closely with Sara Calkins our court administrator and the entire Water Court team to ensure we continue to issue decrees and close claims efficiently and accurately. To that end, I authored several recent orders to address issues of statewide procedural importance, including clarifying the water rights tabulation process to assist the district courts. I plan to continue to use the

Adjudication Advisory Committee to improve the Court's procedures. I also will work to maintain transparency through public outreach, reporting to the Water Policy Interim Committee, and providing public access to Court decisions and information. I know and appreciate DNRC's critical role in the adjudication. I hope to continue enhancing the Court's relationship with the agency, which ultimately results in better service to those in the water community who rely on timely and accurate decisions and information.

Finally, I note my time as a practicing attorney. I spent several decades counseling clients and developing litigation strategies for cases before the Court. I continue to draw on that experience in deciding individual cases and in implementing Court procedures generally. Additionally, for many years I served in management and leadership roles for an established law firm. The organizational and interpersonal skills I gained have been valuable in my time with the Court.

Thank you for considering this application. It is a privilege to serve as a Water Court judge. I would welcome the opportunity to continue this service to Montana.

I am happy to provide any additional information or answer any questions.

Sincerely,



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Stephen R. Brown