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State Court Will Examine Water Rights in Kootenai Basin

The Idaho Supreme Court has selected the judge and jurisdiction for a general adjudication of water rights in the Kootenai River Basin, continuing more than three decades of work to clarify the use of water in Idaho.

A general stream adjudication is a lawsuit to inventory the water rights of an entire stream system by deciding their nature, extent and priority. The process confirms the details of these rights for all users, from the U.S. government to individual property owners. It provides information that helps manage the use of water according to Idaho law, including in situations where water rights conflict or additional water rights are created.

The Idaho Legislature earlier this year passed a law authorizing the Kootenai Basin adjudication to move forward, examining water rights in Idaho's northern tip. The Supreme Court's [new order](#) confirms the judge and the court that will handle this adjudication: District Judge Eric Wildman, who presides over the state's longtime water court based in Twin Falls.

This work in the Kootenai Basin is the sixth in a series of Idaho water rights adjudications. Most notably, the Snake River Basin Adjudication – which addressed water rights across the vast majority of this state – began in 1987 and finished in 2014. Idaho is generally considered a leader in its experience with water rights adjudications, particularly in the West.

Sometime in the coming months, the state of Idaho is expected to file a petition with the water court to begin the Kootenai Basin adjudication. Water users within the basin will then need to file claims with the court regarding their rights. Those claims will be evaluated by the Idaho Department of Water Resources, which will make recommendations to the court. A water user who disagrees with a recommendation on their rights can challenge it in court. Eventually, a final unified decree will wrap up the adjudication process.

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