

**BEFORE THE DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION
OF THE STATE OF MONTANA**

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APPLICATION FOR BENEFICIAL WATER USE	)	DRAFT PRELIMINARY
PERMIT NO. 76LJ 30172157 BY BLAKE	)	DETERMINATION TO GRANT
WHITNEY THOMPSON REVOCABLE TRUST	)	

* * * * *

Blake Whitney Thompson Revocable Trust (Applicant) submitted Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 76LJ 30172157 to the Kalispell Regional Office of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation on March 2, 2026. The Applicant proposes to divert water from Flathead River (Flathead Lake) at a rate of 20.00 gallons per minute up to 2.89 acre-feet to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard from April 15th to October 15th annually. The Department published receipt of the application on its website on March 9, 2026. The Department sent the Applicant a deficiency letter under § 85-2-302, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), dated March 23, 2026. The Applicant responded with information on April 15, 2026. A preapplication meeting was held between the Department and the Applicant's consultant, Core Water Consulting, on October 28, 2025, in which the Applicant designated that the technical analyses for this application would be completed by the Department. The Applicant returned the completed Preapplication Meeting Form on October 31, 2025. The Department delivered the Department-completed Technical Analyses on November 19, 2025. The Application was determined to be correct and complete as of May 15, 2026. An Environmental Assessment for this application was completed on July 13, 2026.

INFORMATION

The Department considered the following information submitted by the Applicant, which is contained in the administrative record.

Application as filed:

- Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit, Form 600
- Attachments:
 - Appendix A – Figures
 - Figure 1. Vicinity Map, dated March 2, 2026
 - Figure 2. Means of Diversion, dated March 2, 2026
 - Figure 3. Lot Layout, dated March 2, 2026
 - Figure 4. Irrigation Zones, dated March 2, 2026
 - Figure A. Pump House details, dated March 2, 2026
 - FWP Bathymetric Map 2018
 - Appendix B – Supplemental Water Right
 - Form 602 Notice of Completion
 - Well Log for GWIC 282919
 - COS 2527
 - Appendix C - Means of Diversion Evidence
 - Appendix D - Possessory Interest
 - Appendix E – DNRC Correspondence
- Department-completed Technical Analyses Report based on information provided in the Preapplication Meeting Form, dated November 19, 2025.

Information within the Department's Possession/Knowledge

- Mean monthly stream flow data from United States Geological Survey (USGS) Gaging Station No. 12372000, Flathead River near Polson, MT. Period of record: October 1938 to April 2025.

- List of existing water rights on the Flathead River from the Inlet of Flathead Lake downstream to the USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000. This list has further been divided into two reaches:
 - From the inlet of Flathead Lake to the Séliš Ksanka Qíispe Dam (SKQ Dam); and,
 - From the SKQ Dam on Flathead Lake to USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000, Flathead River near Polson, MT.
- The following information is not included in the administrative file for this application but is available upon request. Please contact the Kalispell Regional Office at 406-752-2288 to request copies of the following documents.

The Department has fully reviewed and considered the evidence and argument submitted in this application and preliminarily determines the following pursuant to the Montana Water Use Act (Title 85, chapter 2, part 3, MCA).

For the purposes of this document:

Department or DNRC means the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation	
NRCS means the Natural Resource Conservation Service	
USGS means the United States Geological Survey	
USDA means the United States Department of Agriculture	
AF means acre-feet	AOPI means Area of Potential Impact
ARM means Administrative Rules of Montana	MCA means Montana Code Annotated
FOF means finding(s) of fact	CFS means cubic feet per second
GPM means gallons per minute	PVC means polyvinyl chloride
PSI means pounds per square inch	POD means point of diversion
TDH means total dynamic head	BGS below ground surface
VFD means variable frequency drive	SKQ means Séliš Ksanka Qíispe

PROPOSED APPROPRIATION

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. The Applicant proposes to divert water from Flathead River (Flathead Lake), hereafter referred to simply as Flathead Lake, by means of a pump from April 15th to October 15th annually at a rate of 20.00 GPM up to 2.89 AF to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard. The proposed point of diversion is located in the SWNESE Section 29, Township 25N, Range 19W, Lake County, Montana. The proposed place of use is located in Government Lot 3, SENESE of Section

29 Township 25N, Range 19W, Lake County, Montana. Table 1 below provides a summary of the proposed use.

Table 1: Summary of Proposed Use						
Flow Rate	Volume	Purpose	Period Of Use	Place Of Use	Point(s) Of Diversion	Priority Date
20.00 GPM	2.89 AF	Irrigation	4/15 - 10/15	Govt. Lot 3 SENESE 29 25N 19W	SWNESE 29 25N 19W	03/02/2026

2. The POD is located in Water Right Basin 76LJ (Flathead River, to and including Flathead Lake) in an area that is not subject to water right basin closures or controlled groundwater area restrictions.
3. Groundwater Certificate 76LJ 30172163 will be supplemental to this provisional permit. Groundwater Certificate 76LJ 30172163 is owned by the Applicant and is currently being used for multiple domestic, lawn and garden, and orchard irrigation purposes. Upon issuance of this provisional permit the well will no longer be the primary source for orchard irrigation, but it will be utilized for redundancy in case there is a call on the surface water source or the diversionary system for the provisional permit is otherwise unable to function. The use of ground water from the well to the Applicant's homes for lawn and garden and multiple domestic use will not change.

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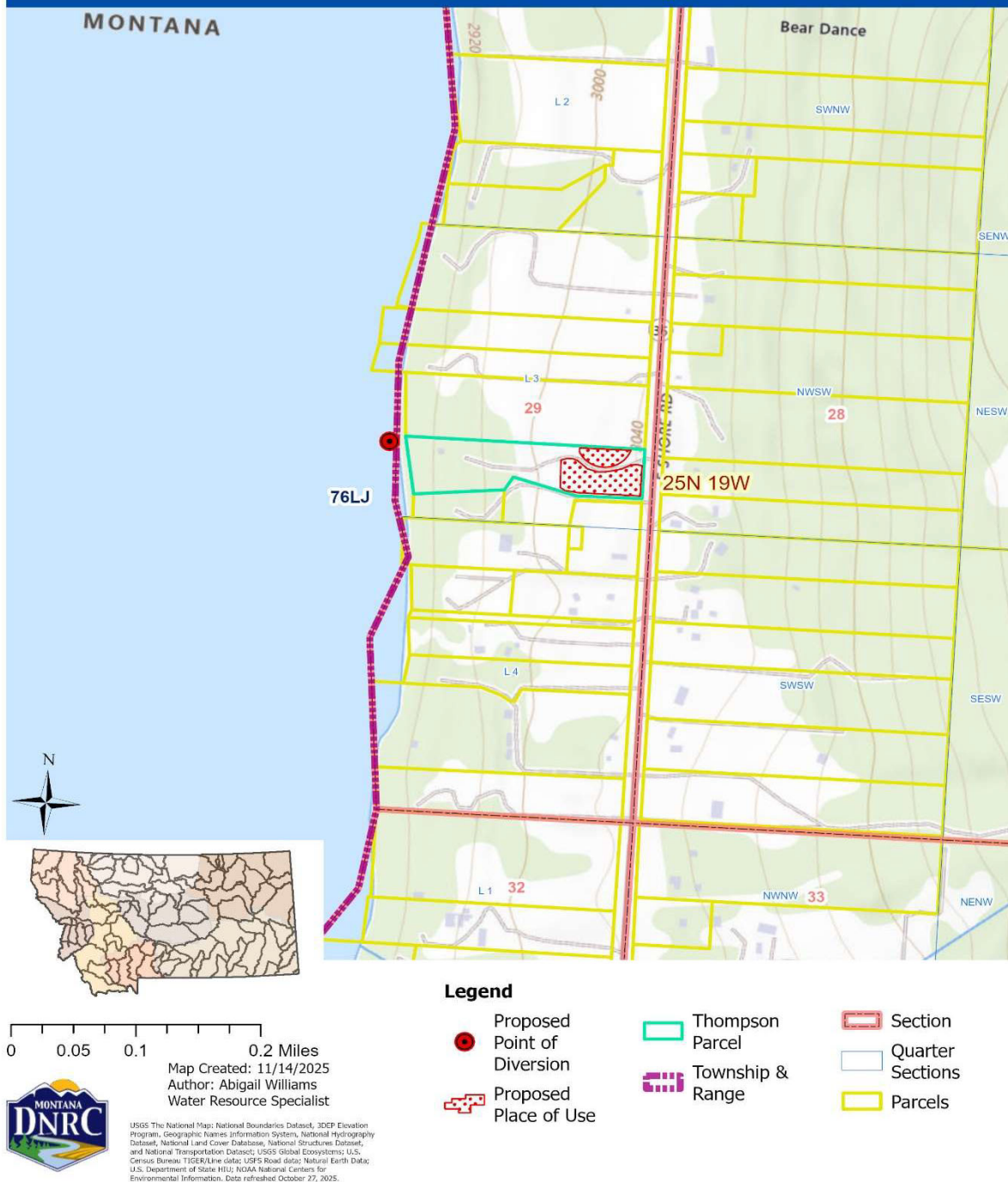


Figure 1: Map of the Applicant's proposed point of diversion and place of use

§ 85-2-311, MCA, BENEFICIAL WATER USE PERMIT CRITERIA

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

4. The Montana Constitution expressly recognizes in relevant part that:
- (1) All existing rights to the use of any waters for any useful or beneficial purpose are hereby recognized and confirmed.
 - (2) The use of all water that is now or may hereafter be appropriated for sale, rent, distribution, or other beneficial use . . . shall be held to be a public use.
 - (3) All surface, underground, flood, and atmospheric waters within the boundaries of the state are the property of the state for the use of its people and are subject to appropriation for beneficial uses as provided by law.

Mont. Const. Art. IX, § 3. While the Montana Constitution recognizes the need to protect senior appropriators, it also recognizes a policy to promote the development and use of the waters of the state by the public. This policy is further expressly recognized in the water policy adopted by the Legislature codified at § 85-2-102, MCA, which states in relevant part:

- (1) Pursuant to Article IX of the Montana constitution, the legislature declares that any use of water is a public use and that the waters within the state are the property of the state for the use of its people and are subject to appropriation for beneficial uses as provided in this chapter. . . .
- (3) It is the policy of this state and a purpose of this chapter to encourage the wise use of the state's water resources by making them available for appropriation consistent with this chapter and to provide for the wise utilization, development, and conservation of the waters of the state for the maximum benefit of its people with the least possible degradation of the natural aquatic ecosystems. In pursuit of this policy, the state encourages the development of facilities that store and conserve waters for beneficial use, for the maximization of the use of those waters in Montana . . .

5. Pursuant to § 85-2-302(1), MCA, except as provided in §§ 85-2-306 and 85-2-369, MCA, a person may not appropriate water or commence construction of diversion, impoundment, withdrawal, or related distribution works except by applying for and receiving a permit from the Department. *See* § 85-2-102(1), MCA. An Applicant in a beneficial water use permit proceeding must affirmatively prove all of the applicable criteria in § 85-2-311, MCA. Section § 85-2-311(1) states in relevant part:

... the department shall issue a permit if the Applicant proves by a preponderance of evidence that the following criteria are met:

(a) (i) there is water physically available at the proposed point of diversion in the amount that the Applicant seeks to appropriate; and

(ii) water can reasonably be considered legally available during the period in which the Applicant seeks to appropriate, in the amount requested, based on the records of the department and other evidence provided to the department. Legal availability is determined using an analysis involving the following factors:

(A) identification of physical water availability;

(B) identification of existing legal demands on the source of supply throughout the area of potential impact by the proposed use; and

(C) analysis of the evidence on physical water availability and the existing legal demands, including but not limited to a comparison of the physical water supply at the proposed point of diversion with the existing legal demands on the supply of water.

(b) the water rights of a prior appropriator under an existing water right, a certificate, a permit, or a state water reservation will not be adversely affected. In this subsection (1)(b), adverse effect must be determined based on a consideration of an Applicant's plan for the exercise of the permit that demonstrates that the Applicant's use of the water will be controlled so the water right of a prior appropriator will be satisfied;

(c) the proposed means of diversion, construction, and operation of the appropriation works are adequate;

(d) the proposed use of water is a beneficial use;

(e) the Applicant has a possessory interest or the written consent of the person with the possessory interest in the property where the water is to be put to beneficial use, or if the proposed use has a point of diversion, conveyance, or place of use on national forest system lands, the Applicant has any written special use authorization required by federal law to occupy, use, or traverse national forest system lands for the purpose of diversion, impoundment, storage, transportation, withdrawal, use, or distribution of water under the permit;

(f) the water quality of a prior appropriator will not be adversely affected;

(g) the proposed use will be substantially in accordance with the classification of water set for the source of supply pursuant to 75-5-301(1); and

(h) the ability of a discharge permit holder to satisfy effluent limitations of a permit issued in accordance with Title 75, chapter 5, part 4, will not be adversely affected.

(2) The Applicant is required to prove that the criteria in subsections (1)(f) through (1)(h) have been met only if a valid objection is filed. A valid objection must contain substantial credible information establishing to the satisfaction of the department that the criteria in subsection (1)(f), (1)(g), or (1)(h), as applicable, may not be met. For the criteria set forth in subsection (1)(g), only the department of environmental quality or a local water quality district established under Title 7, chapter 13, part 45, may file a valid objection.

To meet the preponderance of evidence standard, “the Applicant, in addition to other evidence demonstrating that the criteria of subsection (1) have been met, shall submit hydrologic or other evidence, including but not limited to water supply data, field reports, and other information developed by the Applicant, the department, the U.S. geological survey, or the U.S. natural resources conservation service and other specific field studies.” Section 85-2-311(5), MCA (emphasis added). The determination of whether an application has satisfied the § 85-2-311, MCA criteria is committed to the discretion of the Department. *Bostwick Properties, Inc. v. Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation*, 2009 MT 181, ¶ 21. The Department is required grant a permit only if the § 85-2-311, MCA, criteria are proven by the Applicant by a preponderance of the evidence. *Id.* A preponderance of evidence is “more probably than not.” *Hohenlohe v. DNRC*, 2010 MT 203, ¶¶ 33, 35, 357 Mont. 438, 240 P.3d 628.

6. Pursuant to § 85-2-312, MCA, the Department may condition permits as it deems necessary to meet the statutory criteria:

(1) (a) The department may issue a permit for less than the amount of water requested, but may not issue a permit for more water than is requested or than can be beneficially used without waste for the purpose stated in the application. The department may require modification of plans and specifications for the appropriation or related diversion or construction. The department may issue a permit subject to terms, conditions, restrictions, and limitations it considers necessary to satisfy the criteria listed in 85-2-311 and subject to subsection (1)(b), and it may issue temporary or seasonal permits. A permit must be issued subject to existing rights and any final determination of those rights made under this chapter.

E.g., Montana Power Co. v. Carey (1984), 211 Mont. 91, 96, 685 P.2d 336, 339 (requirement to grant applications as applied for, would result in, “uncontrolled development of a valuable natural resource” which “contradicts the spirit and purpose underlying the Water Use Act.”); *see also, In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 65779-76M by Barbara L. Sowers* (DNRC Final Order 1988)(conditions in stipulations may be included if it further compliance with statutory criteria); *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water*

Use Permit No. 42M-80600 and Application for Change of Appropriation Water Right No. 42M-036242 by Donald H. Wyrick (DNRC Final Order 1994); Admin. R. Mont. (ARM) 36.12.207.

7. The Montana Supreme Court further recognized in *Matter of Beneficial Water Use Permit Numbers 66459-76L, Ciotti: 64988-G76L, Starner*, 278 Mont. 50, 60-61, 923 P.2d 1073, 1079, 1080 (1996), *superseded by legislation on another issue*:

Nothing in that section [85-2-313], however, relieves an Applicant of his burden to meet the statutory requirements of § 85-2-311, MCA, before DNRC may issue that provisional permit. Instead of resolving doubts in favor of appropriation, the Montana Water Use Act requires an Applicant to make explicit statutory showings that there are unappropriated waters in the source of supply, that the water rights of a prior appropriator will not be adversely affected, and that the proposed use will not unreasonably interfere with a planned use for which water has been reserved.

See also, Wesmont Developers v. DNRC, CDV-2009-823, First Judicial District Court,

Memorandum and Order (2011). The Supreme Court likewise explained that:

.... unambiguous language of the legislature promotes the understanding that the Water Use Act was designed to protect senior water rights holders from encroachment by junior appropriators adversely affecting those senior rights.

Montana Power Co., 211 Mont. at 97-98, 685 P.2d at 340; *see also* Mont. Const. art. IX §3(1).

8. An appropriation, diversion, impoundment, use, restraint, or attempted appropriation, diversion, impoundment, use, or restraint contrary to the provisions of § 85-2-311, MCA is invalid. An officer, agent, agency, or employee of the state may not knowingly permit, aid, or assist in any manner an unauthorized appropriation, diversion, impoundment, use, or other restraint. A person or corporation may not, directly or indirectly, personally or through an agent, officer, or employee, attempt to appropriate, divert, impound, use, or otherwise restrain or control waters within the boundaries of this state except in accordance with this § 85-2-311, MCA. Section 85-2-311(6), MCA.

9. The Department may take notice of judicially cognizable facts and generally recognized technical or scientific facts within the Department's specialized knowledge, as specifically identified in this document. ARM 36.12.221(4).

PHYSICAL AVAILABILITY

FINDINGS OF FACT

10. The Applicant proposes to divert water from Flathead Lake at a rate of 20.00 GPM up to 2.89 AF per year to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard from April 15th to October 15th.

11. Physical availability of Flathead Lake was calculated using data from USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000 on the Flathead River near Polson, MT. This gage was selected as it is the nearest gage to the proposed POD and is located approximately 18 miles downstream of the proposed POD. The entire period of record for USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000, that ranges from October 1938 to April 2025, was used. The Department calculated the physical availability of Flathead Lake water at the proposed POD using the following method:

- a. The Department calculated median of the mean monthly flow rates in CFS for Flathead Lake, using USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000 records for each month of the proposed period of diversion (Table 2, column B). Those flows were converted to monthly volumes in AF (Table 2, column C) using the following conversion found in the DNRC Water Calculation Guide: median of the mean monthly flow (CFS) $\times$ 1.98 (AF/day/1 CFS) $\times$ days per month = AF/month.

The Department calculated the monthly flows appropriated by existing users upstream of USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000 (Table 2, column D) by:

- i. Generating a list of existing water rights from the Flathead Lake inlet down to USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000 (this list is contained in the administrative file and is available upon request);
- ii. Designating uses as occurring during their claimed or permitted periods of diversion;
- iii. Assigning a single combined flow rate of 0.08 CFS to all livestock direct from source rights without a designated flow rate (per DNRC adjudication standards); and,
- iv. Assuming that the flow rate of each existing right is continuously diverted throughout each month of the period of diversion. This assumption is necessary due to the difficulty of differentiating the distribution of appropriated volume over the period of diversion.

This leads to an overestimation of existing uses from the source. The Department finds

this an appropriate measure of assessing existing rights as it protects existing water users.

- b. Since the gage used is downstream of the POD, the Department added in the flow rates of the existing diversionary water rights between USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000 and the Flathead Lake inlet (Table 2, column D) to the median of the mean monthly gage values (Table 2, column B) to determine physical availability of water at the POD from Flathead Lake (Table 2, column E). Physically available monthly flows were then converted to monthly volumes (Table 2, column F).

Table 2: Physical Availability at the Point of Diversion on Flathead Lake					
A	B	C	D	E	F
Month	Median of the Mean Monthly Flows at USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000 (CFS)	Median of the Mean Monthly Volume at USGS Gaging Station No. 12372000 (AF)	Existing Legal Demands from the Flathead Lake Inlet to the Gage (CFS)	Physically Available Water at POD (CFS)	Physically Available Water at POD (AF)
April	9,223.0	547,846.2	5,378.8	14,601.8	867,347.5
May	18,560.0	1,139,212.8	5,429.5	23,989.5	1,472,474.9
June	25,400.0	1,508,760.0	5,437.6	30,837.6	1,831,751.7
July	12,730.0	781,367.4	5,438.1	18,168.1	1,115,159.2
August	6,126.0	376,013.9	5,438.1	11,564.1	709,805.7
September	5,956.5	353,816.1	5,413.5	11,370.0	675,375.6
October	7,184.0	440,953.9	5,385.7	12,569.7	771,525.1

12. Based on the physical availability analysis of Flathead Lake at the Applicant's proposed POD, the Department finds that the requested flow rate of 20.00 GPM (0.04 CFS) up to 2.89 AF of volume annually is physically available in Flathead Lake during the proposed period of diversion from April 15th to October 15th.

LEGAL AVAILABILITY

FINDINGS OF FACT

13. The Applicant proposes to divert water from Flathead Lake at a rate of 20.00 GPM up to 2.89 AF per year to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard from April 15th to October 15th.

14. The Department determined the AOPI for this application to be Flathead Lake from the inlet of the lake downstream to the SKQ Dam. This AOPI is appropriate as diversion of water at the proposed POD would reduce flow and volume in the lake, the outflow of which is controlled by the SKQ Dam. The Department found 1,793 water rights within the AOPI to evaluate for legal availability, with the exception of the hydropower water rights held by the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, 76L 94408-00 and 76L 94409-00 which are addressed in FOF 16-18. This list is in the administrative file and is available upon request. The Department calculated the legal availability of Flathead Lake water at the proposed POD using the following method:

- a. The Department calculated physically available flows and volumes at the proposed point of diversion (Table 2, Columns B-C).
- b. The Department calculated the monthly flows appropriated by existing users (Table 2, Column D) between the proposed point of diversion and the SKQ Dam by:
 - i. Generating a list of existing water rights from the Flathead Lake inlet to the SKQ Dam (this list is included in the application file and is available upon request);
 - ii. Designating the uses as occurring during their claimed or permitted periods of diversion;
 - iii. Assigning a single combined flow rate of 0.08 CFS to all livestock direct from source rights without a designated flow rate (per DNRC adjudication standards); and,
 - iv. Assuming the flow rate of each existing water right is continuously diverted throughout each month of the period of diversion. This assumption is necessary due to the difficulty of differentiating the distribution of appropriated volume over the period of diversion. This leads to an overestimation of legal demands on the physical volume of water. The Department finds this is an appropriate measure of assessing existing water rights as it protects existing water users.

15. The Department subtracted the flow rates of the existing legal demands (Table 2, Column D) within the AOPI from the physically available water (Table 2, Column B) to get the legally available flow rates at the POD (Table 2, Column E). Legally available monthly flow rates were then converted into monthly volumes (Table 2, Column F).

Table 2: Legal Availability from the proposed POD to the SKQ Dam					
A	B	C	D	E	F
Month	Physically Available Water at POD (CFS)	Physically Available Water at POD (AF)	Existing Legal Demands within the AOPI (CFS)	Legally Available Flow (CFS)	Legally Available Volume (AF)
April	14,601.8	867,347.5	5,378.7	9,223.1	547,851.5
May	23,989.5	1,472,474.9	5,428.7	18,560.8	1,139,258.8
June	30,837.6	1,831,751.7	5,436.8	25,400.8	1,508,804.6
July	18,168.1	1,115,159.2	5,437.4	12,730.8	781,413.4
August	11,564.1	709,805.7	5,437.4	6,126.8	376,059.9
September	11,370.0	675,375.6	5,412.7	5,957.3	353,860.7
October	12,569.7	771,525.1	5,385.6	7,184.1	440,959.4

16. The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes own hydropower water rights for Séliš Ksanka Qíispé Dam under Statements of Claim 76L 94408-00 and 76L 94409-00. These claims authorize a combined flow rate of 14,540 CFS for power generation, with a direct flow volume of up to 614,200 AF and a storage volume of 614,700 second foot days (equivalent to 1,217,106 AF). A second foot day represents the volume of water produced by a flow of one cubic foot per second over a 24-hour period. The total claimed volume for hydropower purposes is therefore 1,831,306 AF.

17. Operations at Séliš Ksanka Qíispé Dam must account for multiple management constraints, including FERC-licensed Flathead Lake levels, instream flow requirements, flood control, and irrigation demands, all of which vary seasonally and annually. Flathead Lake provides substantial storage, and the dam re-regulates flows on the Flathead River. Storage of water in Flathead Lake allows for diversion of the full flow rate of the Séliš Ksanka Qíispé Dam hydropower water rights at any point of the year. The 14,540 CFS flow rate for power generation is not a legal demand for the constant diversion for the full flow rate, it is limited to

the claimed volume of the rights: 1,831,306 AF. At the combined claimed flow rate of 14,540 CFS flowing 24 hours per day, the direct flow hydropower right and storage for hydropower water right, can be fulfilled over a period of 64 days. Dam operations can achieve the maximum flow rate of 76L 94408-00 at any point in the year and meet hydropower legal demands (flow rate and volume) throughout the year.

18. Flow records from the USGS gage at Polson (12372000) for the period of October 1938 – April 2025 indicate that an average annual volume of approximately 8,260,567 AF passes the gage, representing the total flow moving through and over the dam. This volume substantially exceeds the 1,831,306 AF required to satisfy the claimed hydropower and storage rights, demonstrating that the legal demands of Statements of Claim 76L 94408-00 and 76L 94409-00 are consistently met on an annual basis.

19. The Applicant has proven by a preponderance of the evidence that water can reasonably be considered legally available during the period in which the Applicant seeks to appropriate, in the amount requested, based on the records of the Department and other evidence provided to the Department. § 85-2-311(1)(a)(ii), MCA.

20. Based on the evaluation of legally available water, the Department finds that the requested flow rate of 20.00 GPM (0.04 CFS) up to 2.89 AF of volume is legally available in Flathead Lake at the proposed POD during the period of diversion from April 15th to October 15th.

ADVERSE EFFECT

FINDINGS OF FACT

21. The Applicant proposes to divert water from Flathead Lake at a rate of 20.00 GPM up to 2.89 AF to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard irrigation from April 15th to October 15th. The Applicant provided a plan showing they can regulate water during times of shortage to ensure senior appropriators' water rights are met. The Applicant's plan is to reduce irrigation in times of water shortage and if a valid call for surface water is made from a senior water right holder, they will be able to cease diverting water from Flathead Lake and revert to the existing groundwater diversion to maintain the orchard.

22. The Applicant has proven that they can regulate their water usage and that a plan is in place to protect existing water users. The Department found that water is both physically and legally available in Flathead Lake during the proposed period of diversion (FOF 12 and 19). The Department finds that the proposed water use will not adversely affect senior water users.

23.

ADEQUATE MEANS OF DIVERSION

FINDINGS OF FACT

24. The Applicant proposes to divert water from Flathead Lake at a rate of 20.00 GPM up to 2.89 AF to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard from April 15th to October 15th by means of a Grundfos SP25S20-11 submersible pump. The submersible pump will convey water to the pumphouse through 250-feet of 1.5-inch PVC line. Within the pumphouse is a VFD paired with two pressure tanks which will operate together to maintain a constant pressure for irrigation demands. From the pumphouse water will be carried uphill along the driveway 420 feet to the Red Lion RJS-75-PREM booster pump via 1.5-inch PVC pipe. The VFD is set to provide 42 psi at the booster pump. From the booster pump, a buried 1.25-inch PVC pipe conveys water along the fence line on the north end of the property to a control box near the existing well head.

25. The current connection to the well will be terminated and connected to the proposed system to supply the irrigated area with surface water instead of ground water. The irrigation system consists of three frost-free hydrants, hydrants A, B, and C. Hydrant A is located near the pumphouse and will facilitate the annual draining of the system. Hydrant B is located near the booster pump and will provide an air gap for the system as well as allowing for maintenance on the system. Hydrant C is located prior to the drip lines in the irrigation system and will supplement irrigation needs for trees that need additional water from the hydrant while the drip lines are in operation. The irrigation system consists of four irrigation zones serviced by a 1.25-inch main line running perpendicular to the irrigation zones with 0.75-inch above-ground PVC line connections to serve the four irrigation zones. Micro sprinkler heads connected to the 0.75-inch lines that run parallel to the irrigation zones will irrigate each tree trunk in each zone with the largest zone consisting of 45 trees (zone 2). The applicant has requested 20.00 GPM to

satisfy the irrigation needs for the orchard. The largest zone (zone 2) currently requires 13.50 GPM. The additional 6.50 GPM requested will supply hydrant C to increase tree density within the orchard as well as to supplement watering from the micro sprinklers with drip lines via hydrant C in any given zone.

26. The Applicant provided information demonstrating a TDH of 230 feet for the system which will utilize a VFD set to maintain an output pressure of 42 PSI and flow rate of 20.00 GPM. The Applicant provided the pump curve for the Grundfos SP25S20-11 submersible motor demonstrating that the pump is capable of producing 20.00 GPM at the calculated TDH.

27. Based on the system design and specifications, the Department finds that the diversion and conveyance system is adequate to supply the requested flow rate of 20.00 GPM (0.04CFS) up to an annual volume of 2.89 AF.

BENEFICIAL USE

FINDINGS OF FACT

28. The Applicant proposes to divert water from Flathead Lake at a rate of 20.00 GPM up to 2.89 AF to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard from April 15th to October 15th.

29. The Applicant's existing well on the property (GWIC 282919) serves water to four homes, 0.18 acres of lawn and garden, and 1.20 acres of orchard under Ground Water Certificate 76LJ 30172163. Upon issuance of this provisional permit, the well will cease to be the main source of water for irrigation of the 1.20-acre orchard and will instead serve as a supplemental source to the surface water source if a valid call is made on the surface water source or if the surface water system is otherwise unable to divert water.

30. The Applicant's property is located within USDA NRCS Climatic Area III. The requested volume of 2.89 AF/ year was calculated using the upper end of the USDA NRCS Climatic Area III irrigation standard range of 2.08 AF/acre to 2.41 AF/acre found in ARM 36.12.115(2)(e) (1.20 acres X 2.41 AF/acre/year = 2.89 AF/year). The Applicant requested the standard period of diversion and a period of use for USDA NRCS Climatic Area III of April 15th to October 15th found in ARM 36.12.112(1)(c)(iii).

31. The Department finds that the proposed water use is beneficial, and that the requested flow rate of 20.00 GPM (0.04 CFS), volume of 2.89 AF/year, and period of diversion/use of April 15th to October 15th are reasonably justified per ARM 36.12.1801(3)(a), ARM 36.12.115(2)(e), and ARM 36.12. 112(1)(c)(iii), respectively.

POSSESSORY INTEREST

FINDINGS OF FACT

32. The Applicant signed the application form affirming that the Applicant has possessory interest or the written consent of the person with possessory interest, in the property where the water is to be put to beneficial use.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

PHYSICAL AVAILABILITY

33. Pursuant to § 85-2-311(1)(a)(i), MCA, an Applicant must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that “there is water physically available at the proposed point of diversion in the amount that the Applicant seeks to appropriate.”

34. It is the Applicant’s burden to produce the required evidence. *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 27665-41I by Anson* (DNRC Final Order 1987) (Applicant produced no flow measurements or any other information to show the availability of water; permit denied); *In the Matter of Application to Change Water Right No. 41H 1223599 by MGRR #1, LLC.*, (DNRC Final Order 2005).

35. An Applicant must prove that at least in some years there is water physically available at the point of diversion in the amount the Applicant seeks to appropriate. *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 72662s76G by John Fee and Don Carlson* (DNRC Final Order 1990); *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 85184s76F by Wills Cattle Co. and Ed McLean* (DNRC Final Order 1994).

36. The Applicant has proven that water is physically available at the proposed point of diversion in the amount Applicant seeks to appropriate. Section 85-2-311(1)(a)(i), MCA. (FOF 10-12)

LEGAL AVAILABILITY

37. Pursuant to § 85-2-311(1)(a), MCA, an Applicant must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that:

(ii) water can reasonably be considered legally available during the period in which the Applicant seeks to appropriate, in the amount requested, based on the records of the department and other evidence provided to the department. Legal availability is determined using an analysis involving the following factors:

(A) identification of physical water availability;

(B) identification of existing legal demands on the source of supply throughout the area of potential impact by the proposed use; and

(C) analysis of the evidence on physical water availability and the existing legal demands, including but not limited to a comparison of the physical water supply at the proposed point of diversion with the existing legal demands on the supply of water.

E.g., ARM 36.12.101 and 36.12.120; *Montana Power Co.*, 211 Mont. 91, 685 P.2d 336 (Permit granted to include only early irrigation season because no water legally available in late irrigation season); *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 81705-g76F by Hanson* (DNRC Final Order 1992).

38. It is the Applicant's burden to present evidence to prove water can be reasonably considered legally available. *Sitz Ranch v. DNRC*, DV-10-13390, Fifth Judicial District Court, *Order Affirming DNRC Decision*, (2011) Pg. 7 (the legislature set out the criteria (§ 85-2-311, MCA) and placed the burden of proof squarely on the Applicant. The Supreme Court has instructed that those burdens are exacting.); *see also Matter of Application for Change of Appropriation Water Rights Nos. 101960-41S and 101967-41S by Royston* (1991), 249 Mont. 425, 816 P.2d 1054 (burden of proof on Applicant in a change proceeding to prove required criteria); *In the Matter of Application to Change Water Right No. 41H 1223599 by MGRR #1, LLC.*, (DNRC Final Order 2005) (it is the Applicant's burden to produce the required evidence.); *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 41H 30023457 by Utility Solutions, LLC* (DNRC Final Order 2007) (permit denied for failure to prove legal availability); *see also* ARM 36.12.1705.

39. Applicant has proven by a preponderance of the evidence that water can reasonably be considered legally available during the period in which the Applicant seeks to appropriate, in the amount requested, based on the records of the Department and other evidence provided to the Department. Section 85-2-311(1)(a)(ii), MCA. (FOF 13-20)

ADVERSE EFFECT

40. Pursuant to § 85-2-311(1)(b), MCA, the Applicant bears the affirmative burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence that the water rights of a prior appropriator under an existing water right, a certificate, a permit, or a state water reservation will not be adversely affected. Analysis of adverse effect must be determined based on a consideration of an Applicant's plan for the exercise of the permit that demonstrates that the Applicant's use of the water will be controlled so the water right of a prior appropriator will be satisfied. *See Montana Power Co.*, 211 Mont. 91, 685 P.2d 336 (1984) (purpose of the Water Use Act is to protect senior appropriators from encroachment by junior users); *Bostwick Properties, Inc.*, ¶ 21.

41. An Applicant must analyze the full area of potential impact under the § 85-2-311, MCA criteria. *In the Matter of Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 76N-30010429 by Thompson River Lumber Company* (DNRC Final Order 2006). While § 85-2-361, MCA, limits the boundaries expressly required for compliance with the hydrogeologic assessment requirement, an Applicant is required to analyze the full area of potential impact for adverse effect in addition to the requirement of a hydrogeologic assessment. *Id.* ARM 36.12.120(5).

42. Applicant must prove that no prior appropriator will be adversely affected, not just the objectors. *Sitz Ranch v. DNRC*, DV-10-13390, Fifth Judicial District Court, *Order Affirming DNRC Decision*, 4 (2011).

43. In analyzing adverse effect to other appropriators, an Applicant may use the water rights claims of potentially affected appropriators as evidence of their "historic beneficial use." *See Matter of Application for Change of Appropriation Water Rights Nos. 101960-41S and 101967-41S by Royston*, 249 Mont. 425, 816 P.2d 1054 (1991).

44. It is the Applicant's burden to produce the required evidence. *E.g., Sitz Ranch v. DNRC*, DV-10-13390, Fifth Judicial District Court, *Order Affirming DNRC Decision*, 7 (2011) (legislature

has placed the burden of proof squarely on the Applicant); *In the Matter of Application to Change Water Right No. 41H 1223599 by MGRR #1, LLC.*, (DNRC Final Order 2005). The Department is required to grant a permit only if the § 85-2-311, MCA, criteria are proven by the Applicant by a preponderance of the evidence. *Bostwick Properties, Inc.*, ¶ 21.

45. Section 85-2-311 (1)(b) of the Water Use Act does not contemplate a de minimis level of adverse effect on prior appropriators. *Wesmont Developers v. DNRC*, CDV-2009-823, First Judicial District Court, *Memorandum and Order*, 8 (2011).

46. The Applicant has proven by a preponderance of the evidence that the water rights of a prior appropriator under an existing water right, a certificate, a permit, or a state water reservation will not be adversely affected. Section 85-2-311(1)(b), MCA. (FOF 21-22)

ADEQUATE DIVERSION

47. Pursuant to § 85-2-311(1)(c), MCA, an Applicant must demonstrate that the proposed means of diversion, construction, and operation of the appropriation works are adequate.

48. The adequate means of diversion statutory test merely codifies and encapsulates the case law notion of appropriation to the effect that the means of diversion must be reasonably effective, i.e., must not result in a waste of the resource. *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 33983s41Q by Hoyt* (DNRC Final Order 1981); § 85-2-312(1)(a), MCA.

49. The Applicant has proven by a preponderance of the evidence that the proposed means of diversion, construction, and operation of the appropriation works are adequate for the proposed beneficial use. Section 85-2-311(1)(c), MCA (FOF 23-26)

BENEFICIAL USE

50. Under § 85-2-311(1)(d), MCA, an Applicant must prove by a preponderance of the evidence the proposed use is a beneficial use.

51. An appropriator may appropriate water only for a beneficial use. See also, § 85-2-301 MCA. It is a fundamental premise of Montana water law that beneficial use is the basis, measure, and limit of the use. *E.g., McDonald; Toohey v. Campbell* (1900), 24 Mont. 13, 60 P.

396. The amount of water under a water right is limited to the amount of water necessary to sustain the beneficial use. *E.g., Bitterroot River Protective Association v. Siebel, Order on Petition for Judicial Review*, Cause No. BDV-2002-519, Montana First Judicial District Court, Lewis and Clark County (2003), *affirmed on other grounds*, 2005 MT 60, 326 Mont. 241, 108 P.3d 518; *In The Matter Of Application For Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 43C 30007297 by Dee Deaterly* (DNRC Final Order), *affirmed other grounds, Dee Deaterly v. DNRC*, Cause No. 2007-186, Montana First Judicial District, *Order Nunc Pro Tunc on Petition for Judicial Review* (2009); *Worden v. Alexander* (1939), 108 Mont. 208, 90 P.2d 160; *Allen v. Petrick* (1924), 69 Mont. 373, 222 P. 451; *In the Matter of Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 41S-105823 by French* (DNRC Final Order 2000).

52. Amount of water to be diverted must be shown precisely. *Sitz Ranch v. DNRC*, DV-10-13390, Fifth Judicial District Court, *Order Affirming DNRC Decision*, 3 (2011) (citing *BRPA v. Siebel*, 2005 MT 60, and rejecting Applicant's argument that it be allowed to appropriate 800 acre-feet when a typical year would require 200-300 acre-feet).

53. It is the Applicant's burden to produce the required evidence. *Bostwick Properties, Inc. v. DNRC*, 2013 MT 48, ¶ 22, 369 Mont. 150, 296 P.3d 1154 ("issuance of the water permit itself does not become a clear, legal duty until [the applicant] proves, by a preponderance of the evidence, that the required criteria have been satisfied"); *Sitz Ranch v. DNRC*, DV-10-13390, Fifth Judicial District Court, *Order Affirming DNRC Decision*, (2011) Pg. 7; *In the Matter of Application to Change Water Right No. 41H 1223599 by MGRR #1, LLC.*, (DNRC Final Order 2005); *see also Royston; Ciotti*.

54. The Applicant proposes to use water for irrigation which is a recognized beneficial use. Section 85-2-102(5), MCA. Applicant has proven by a preponderance of the evidence that irrigation is a beneficial use and that 2.89 AF of diverted volume and 20.0 GPM is the amount needed to sustain the beneficial use. Section 85-2-311(1)(d), MCA. (FOF 27-30)

POSSESSORY INTEREST

55. Pursuant to § 85-2-311(1)(e), MCA, an Applicant must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that it has a possessory interest or the written consent of the person with the

possessory interest in the property where the water is to be put to beneficial use, or if the proposed use has a point of diversion, conveyance, or place of use on national forest system lands, the Applicant has any written special use authorization required by federal law to occupy, use, or traverse national forest system lands for the purpose of diversion, impoundment, storage, transportation, withdrawal, use, or distribution of water under the permit.

56. Pursuant to ARM 36.12.1802:

(1) An Applicant or a representative shall sign the application affidavit to affirm the following:

(a) the statements on the application and all information submitted with the application are true and correct and

(b) except in cases of an instream flow application, or where the application is for sale, rental, distribution, or is a municipal use, or in any other context in which water is being supplied to another and it is clear that the ultimate user will not accept the supply without consenting to the use of water on the user's place of use, the Applicant has possessory interest in the property where the water is to be put to beneficial use or has the written consent of the person having the possessory interest.

(2) If a representative of the Applicant signs the application form affidavit, the representative shall state the relationship of the representative to the Applicant on the form, such as president of the corporation, and provide documentation that establishes the authority of the representative to sign the application, such as a copy of a power of attorney.

(3) The department may require a copy of the written consent of the person having the possessory interest.

57. The Applicant has proven by a preponderance of the evidence that it has a possessory interest, or the written consent of the person with the possessory interest, in the property where the water is to be put to beneficial use. Section 85-2-311(1)(e), MCA. (FOF 31)

PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION

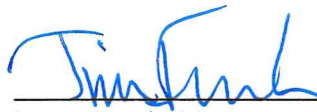
Subject to the terms, analysis, and conditions in this Order, the Department preliminarily determines that this Application for Beneficial Water Use Permit No. 76LJ 30172157 should be GRANTED.

The Department determines the Applicant may divert Flathead River (Flathead Lake) water by means of a pump at a rate of 20.00 GPM up to 2.89 AF/year to irrigate 1.20 acres of orchard from April 15th to October 15th, annually. The point of diversion is located in the SWNESE Section 29, Township 25N, Range 19W, Lake County, Montana. The place of use is located in Government Lot 3, SENESE of Section 29 Township 25N, Range 19W, Lake County, Montana.

NOTICE

The Department will provide a notice of opportunity for public comment on this application and the Department's Draft Preliminary Determination to Grant pursuant to § 85-2-307, MCA. The Department will set a deadline for public comments to this application pursuant to §§ 85-2-307, and -308, MCA. If this application receives public comment pursuant to § 85-2-307(4), the Department shall consider the public comments, respond to the public comments, and issue a preliminary determination to grant the application, grant the application in modified form, or deny the application. If no public comments are received pursuant to § 85-2-307(4), MCA, the Department's preliminary determination will be adopted as the final determination.

DATED this 13th day of July, 2026.



James Ferch, Manager
Kalispell Regional Office
Montana Department of Natural Resources and
Conservation

PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION

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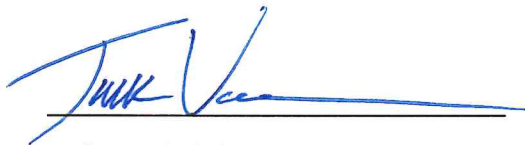
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

This certifies that a true and correct copy of the DRAFT PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION TO GRANT was served upon all parties listed below on this 13th day of July, 2026, by first class United States mail.

BLAKE WHITNEY THOMPSON REVOCABLE TRUST
PO BOX 7598
SAINT PETERSBURG FL 33734-7598

Via email:

Mikel Simmens, P.E
Core Water Consulting



Jack Vanderbilt

Kalispell Regional Office, (406) 752-2702