



Lake Creek Subdivision

Area 55, Book 12

***Water Rights Adjudication
Public Meeting***

July 29, 2021

Utah Division of Water Rights

Michael Drake, P.E.

Assistant State Engineer - Adjudication

www.waterrights.utah.gov

Agenda

- Water Right and Adjudication Overview
- Proposed Determination Process
- Anticipated Timeline
- Questions

1. Email:

waterrights_adjudication@utah.gov

2. Post in Comments

3. Wait for Breakout Rooms



What is a Water Right?

A **water right** is a right to divert (remove from its natural source) and beneficially use water. The defining elements of a typical water right will include:

- A defined **nature of beneficial use**
- A **priority date**
- A defined **quantity** of water allowed for diversion by flow rate (cfs) and/or by volume (acre-feet)
- A specified **point of diversion** and source of water
- A specified **place of beneficial use**

A water right MAY be evidenced by...

- Wells located on your property
- Irrigation ditches or head-gates located on your property

A water right is NOT...

- A share in an irrigation company
- A connection to a public water supplier (e.g., water that is provided by a municipality)



Historical Context – The Pioneer Era

July 23, 1847: Advance party of the **Mormon pioneers** entered the Salt Lake Valley and began breaking-up the ground to prepare the land for crops. **Water from City Creek Canyon** was diverted to moisten the soil for plowing and later used for irrigation.

September 30, 1848: **Brigham Young** declares, "There shall be **no private ownership** of the streams that come out of the canyons... **These belong to the people:** all the people."

1847 – 1850: The pioneer settlement went from being part of **Mexico** to the **State of Deseret** to the **Territory of Utah**; however, government remained Church-centric.

- Diversions of water from streams were generally on a **community basis** to meet the immediate needs of the settlers.
- The **doctrine of priority** evolved from Church leaders' recognition of groups who first put the water to beneficial use as well as later beneficiaries (primary and secondary rights).
- **Conflicts were settled through ecclesiastical channels**; Bishop's Courts for local wards provided a judicial process with Stake High Councils serving as appellate courts.



Historical Context - Territorial Era

1852: The first Territorial Legislative Assembly passed an act authorizing the **County Court** control of "*all timber, water privileges, or any water course or creek.*" **Salt Lake County** was the only one to assume these duties... other counties streams were diverted without public restriction.

1877: The **Desert Land Act** was passed to promote homesteading of arid and semiarid public land. The Act also **severed the title** of the water from the public land and **delegated authority** to the respective **state or territory** with regard to how water was appropriated.

1880: Due to **failure to enforce** the 1852 act, the legislature passed an act that replaced the County Court's authority with **County Selectmen** as the ex-officio water commissioners. Allowed recognition, determination, and recording... but not appropriation. Once again, this was **only enforced in a few counties** and the certificates were generally considered worthless.

- **Confusion** over existing water rights continued in spite of the efforts of the Utah Territorial Legislature.
- The **Church continued to administer and decree water rights** in some areas (e.g. 1879 High Council Decision to divide the waters of the Spanish Fork River among various canal companies).



Historical Context - Statehood and Beyond

1896: Utah gains Statehood. Due to **fears of possible confiscation** of existing water rights by the State under a comprehensive water code, the adopted constitution only had **one sentence** regarding water law:

"All existing rights to the use of any of the waters in this State for any useful or beneficial purpose, are hereby recognized and confirmed."

- Constitution of the State of Utah, Article XVII

1897: **Office of the State Engineer** created and tasked with conducting **hydrographic surveys** and measuring stream sources. **Appropriations** were made by posting notice at the **source**, the nearest **post office**, and the **county recorder**... largely ignored.

1902: **United States Reclamation Service** (i.e. The Bureau of Reclamation) established to "reclaim" arid lands in the Western United States. To secure Federal funding for **Reclamation projects**, **states were encouraged to adopt statutes** which provided certainty regarding existing water rights and future appropriations.

1903: State legislature enacted the first comprehensive **water law** which provided for appropriating surface rights, **recording of all existing water rights**, and the **adjudicating of rights** by the Court. However, the **Legislature failed to provide funding** to the local Courts.

1919: The legislature provided the "machinery" to adjudicate water rights on a given stream by directing the **State Engineer** to develop a "**proposed determination**" of water rights for the Court to consider.

1935: The legislature required all **groundwater** to be appropriated through the State Engineer's office similar to surface water.



Willard Young
State Engineer



The Historical Case for Adjudication

- Prior to the enactment of the comprehensive Utah Water Law in 1903, rights to the use of water typically fell into a combination of five categories:
 1. Rights decreed by **ecclesiastical leaders**.
 2. Claims **filed for record** at the county.
 3. Rights **decreed by a court** (typically involving limited parties).
 4. Contracts or **agreements** among limited parties.
 5. Claims **never manifested in any record**, but evidenced by pre-statutory use.

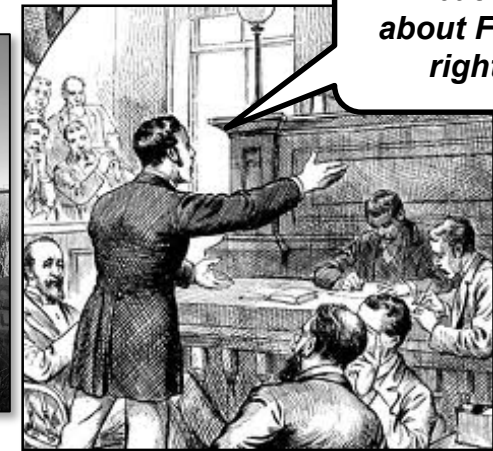


- Consequently, the lack of a definitive water law created a number of issues:
 1. There was typically **no public record** of existing water rights.
 2. Since there was no record, **over appropriation** of streams was common.
 3. Often, rights **weren't defined** until they came into **controversy** and had to be settled by ecclesiastical or court decree.

Why Do We Conduct General Adjudications?

1. Bring all claims on to the permanent record:

- Pre-Statutory Claims
 - *Diligence Claims (1903)*
 - *Underground Water Claims (1935)*
- Federal Reserve Rights
 - *Winter's Doctrine (1908)*
 - *McCarran Amendment (1952)*



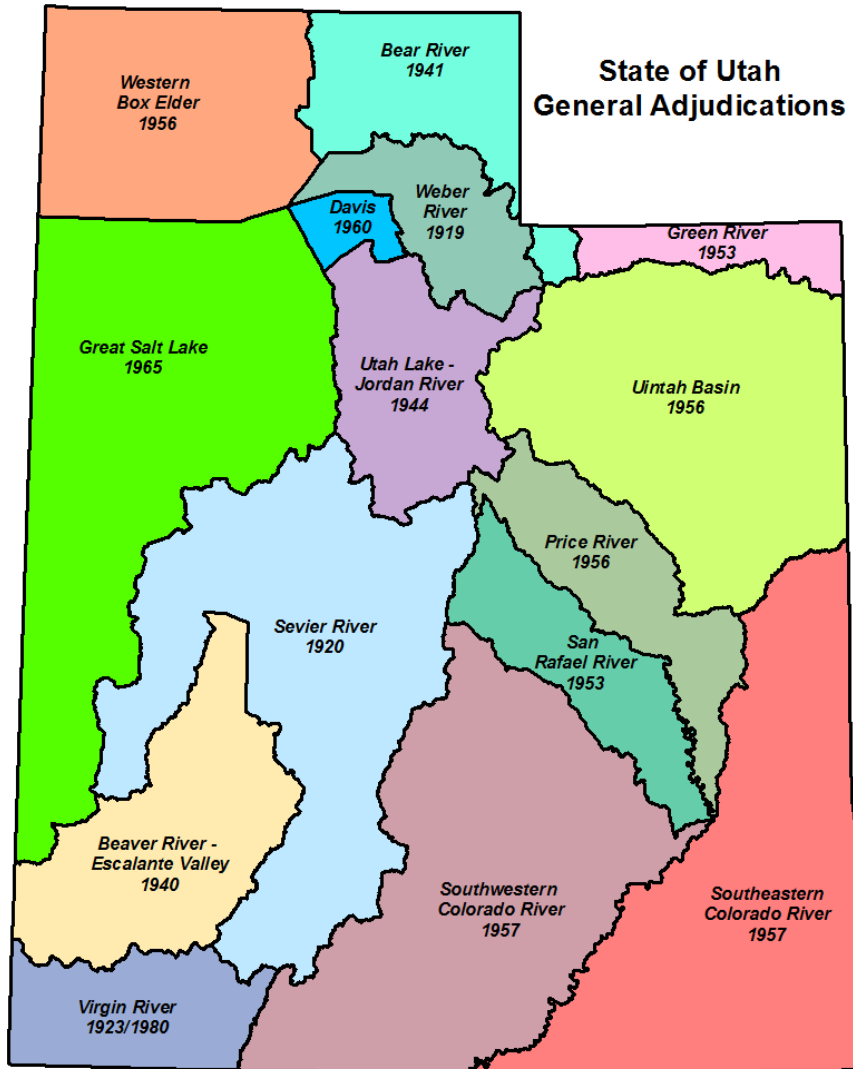
...but what
about Federal
rights?

2. To prevent a “multiplicity of suits” and bring clarity to the water rights picture.
3. Remove/reduce rights which have been wholly or partially abandoned or forfeited through non-use.
4. To obtain final comprehensive decrees on all water rights within the respective drainage.



What is a General Stream Adjudication?

State of Utah
General Adjudications

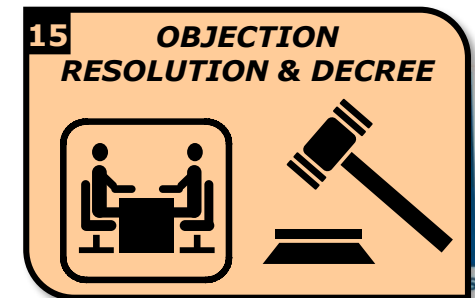
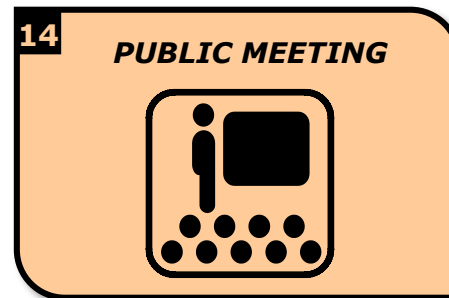
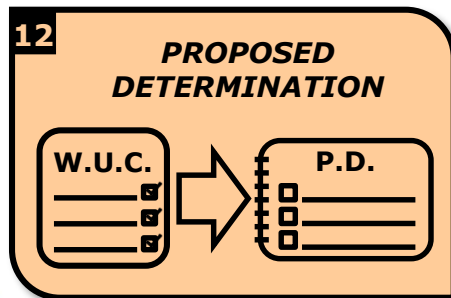
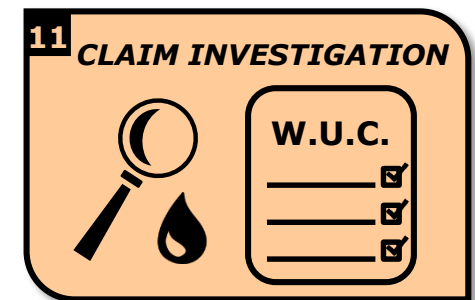
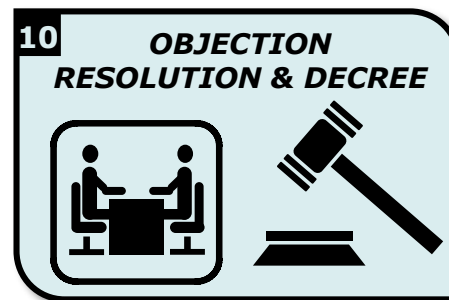
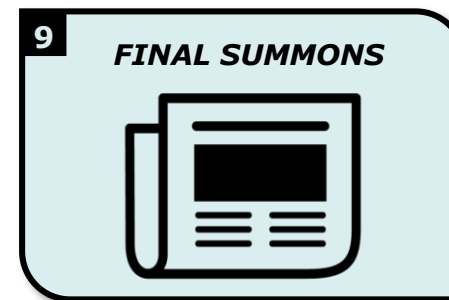
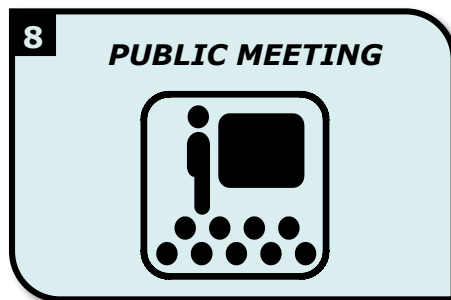
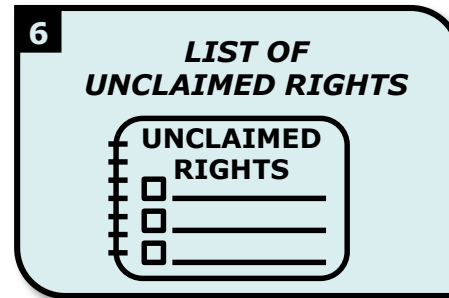
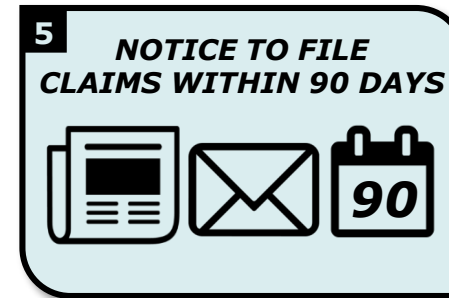
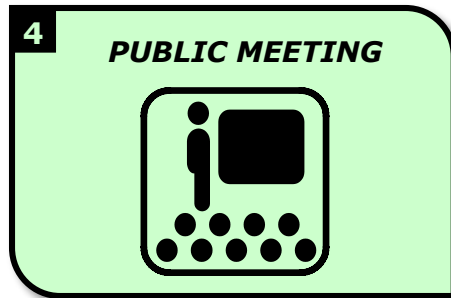
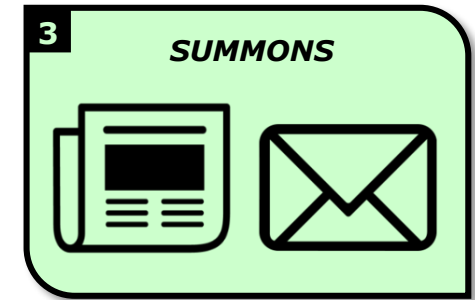
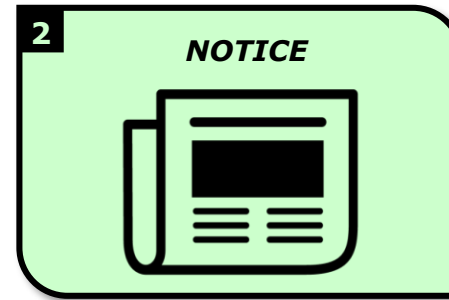
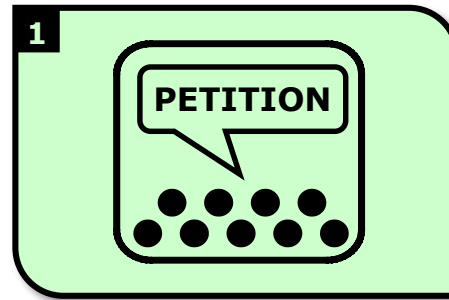


What it *IS*...

- Action in State District Court
- Binds water users and the State Engineer (Division of Water Rights)
- Governed by Utah State Code: Title 73, Chapter 4.
- The first General Stream Adjudications took place in the 1920s – Sevier, Weber and the Virgin River basins.



The Adjudication Process



Filing your Water User's Claim

Notice to Submit Claims

1



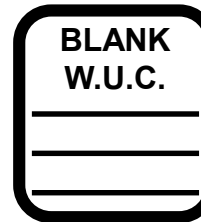
Mailed
to water right
owners and
property owners



Published
in a local
newspaper

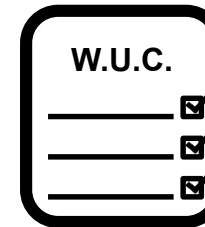
Water User's Claim Forms

2



Property Owners
A blank water
user's claim will
be mailed to
property owners

Water Right Owners
A pre-filled water
user's claim
mailed to water
right owners



Filing Your Water User's Claim

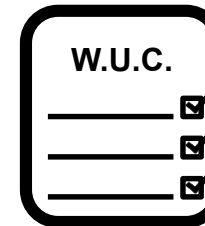
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**District Court
or
State Engineer**

Claimants will have **90 days** to complete/review and file their water user's claims with the **District Court** or **State Engineer**. Claimants can request one **30-day extension** from the State Engineer prior to the conclusion of the 90-day period.

4



Water user's claims that are filed are **investigated** and **mapped** by the State Engineer. This investigation forms the basis of the State Engineer's recommendation to the District Court.



List of Unclaimed Rights

List of Unclaimed Rights (L.U.R.)

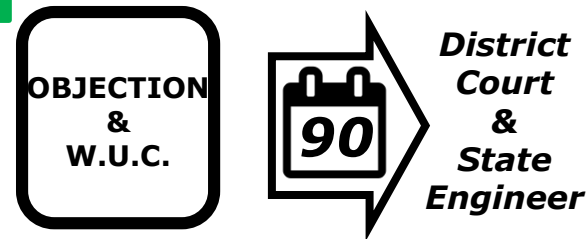
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Water rights of record for which **no claim was filed** within the 90-day period will be included in the **List of Unclaimed Rights**. A **public meeting** is held once the List of Unclaimed Rights is published / filed with the court.

Objections to the L.U.R.

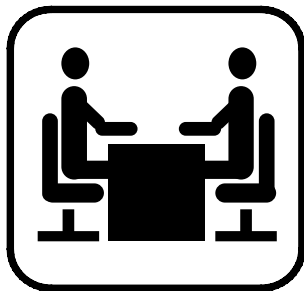
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Claimants will have 90 days to file an **objection** to the List of Unclaimed Rights with the District Court. They must also file **a water user's claim** with the court and the State Engineer.

Objection Resolution (as needed)

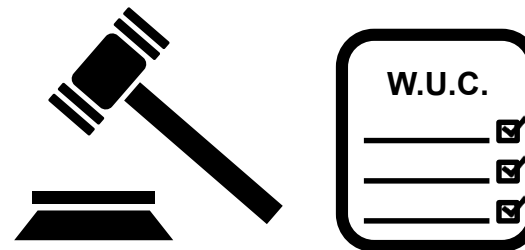
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The State Engineer may choose to **litigate**, file a **concurring motion**, or **remain silent**. If the court allows the claim, the State Engineer will evaluate the claim in the Proposed Determination.

Judicial Decree

8

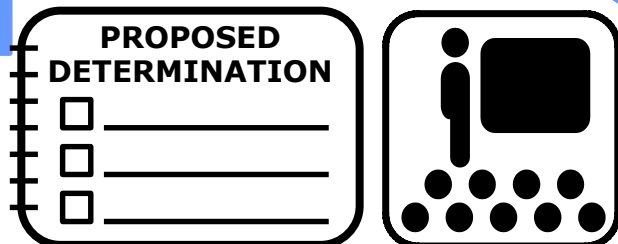


Once objections (if any) are resolved, the court renders a judgment that the **rights on the L.U.R. are abandoned** with the exception of those allowed as a result of a successful objection. It may also **prohibit future diligence claims** from being filed.

Proposed Determination

Proposed Determination (P.D.)

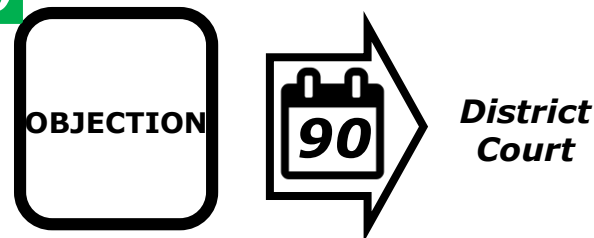
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Water user's claims that are filed are **investigated** and **mapped** by the State Engineer and included in the Proposed Determination. A **public meeting** is held once the Proposed Determination is published / filed with the court.

Objections to the P.D.

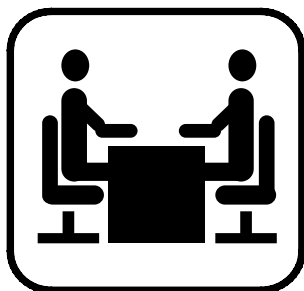
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Claimants will have 90 days to file an **objection** to the Proposed Determination with the District Court.

Objection Resolution (as needed)

11



The State Engineer may choose to **litigate** against any objections, **negotiate** a settlement, or **seek a voluntary withdrawal**.

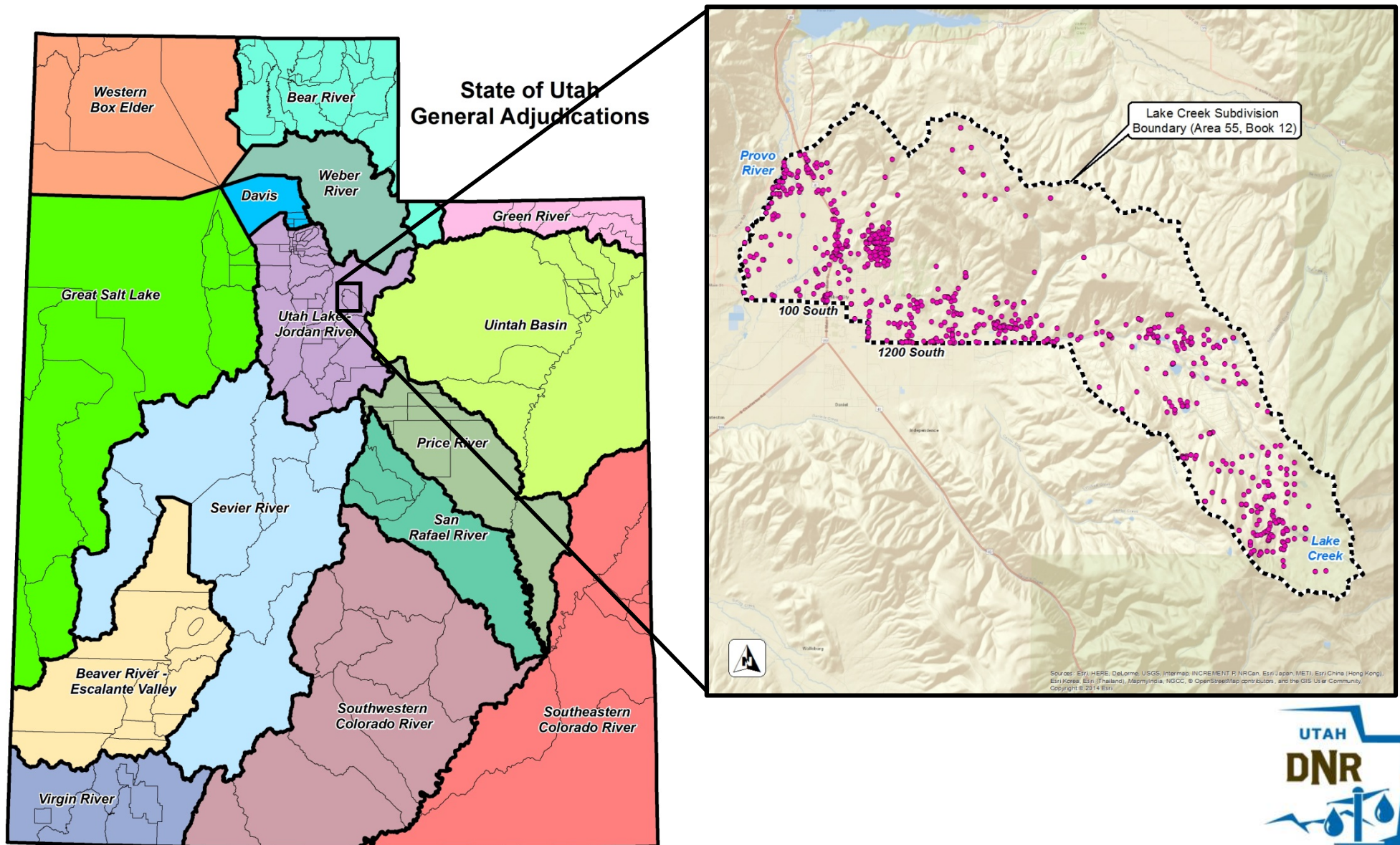
Judicial Decree

12



Once objections (if any) are resolved, the court renders a judgment **confirming** the Proposed Determination or **modifying** it based on any objections filed.

Lake Creek Subdivision Adjudication Boundary



Anticipated Timeline

Anticipated Timeline:

August 12, 2021 (Planned):

- Notice to file claims to water right owners of record and property owners.
- 90-day claim-filing period begins.

November 10, 2021 (Tentative):

- 90-day claim-filing period ends.
- State Engineer investigates filed water user's claims.

May 2022:

- State Engineer publishes the List of Unclaimed Rights.
- State Engineer holds a public meeting.
- 90-day objection period begins.

August 2022:

- 90-day objection period for List of Unclaimed Rights ends.

August 2024:

- State Engineer publishes the Proposed Determination.
- State Engineer holds a public meeting.
- 90-day objection period begins.

November 2024:

- 90-day objection period for Proposed Determination ends.



Common Issues

- Out-of-date title – If title to a water right is not correct, you can update title by filing a “Report of Conveyance”, together with the conveying deed. This may need to be prepared by a title professional.
- Lapsed Applications – Lapsed applications for small water rights can be reinstated. Submit a Water User Claim and an Affidavit of Beneficial Use.
- Irrigation Shares or Share Statements – If your water right is based on ownership of shares in a local irrigation company, you do not need to file a Water User Claim. The irrigation company will file one on your behalf.



Will I lose my water right?

- Water users who are currently using their water right in conformance with the records on file with the Division of Water Rights have nothing to worry about as long as they file their water user's claim within the prescribed time frame.
- Individuals using water ***without a water right of record*** are required to submit a claim during the proposed determination process or ***risk being barred*** from future claims and use.
- If the water use authorized under the water right has fallen ***out of use for 7-years or more***, the water right—or a portion of it—may be recommended to be ***disallowed*** in the proposed determination.



Who can I contact to discuss the Adjudication Process?

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Website Tour



Questions?

For online viewers, questions can be emailed to:
waterrights_adjudication@utah.gov

