

SUPERIOR COURT OF ARIZONA  
MARICOPA COUNTY

January 9, 2025

CLERK OF THE COURT

SPECIAL WATER MASTER  
SHERRI ZENDRI

S. Ortega  
Deputy

In Re: *Walterio G. and Teresita Romero*  
**Case No. W1-11-3109**

FILED: January 14, 2025

In Re The General Adjudication  
Of All Rights to Use Water in the  
Gila River System and Source

W-1, W-2, W-3 and W-4 (Consolidated)

In Re: Status Conference

**MINUTE ENTRY**

Central Court Building – Courtroom 301

10:30 a.m. This is the time set for a Status Conference before Special Water Master Sherri Zendri.

A record of the proceedings is made digitally in lieu of a court reporter.

The following parties/counsel appear virtually and/or telephonically:

- Maria Romero-Sims, Personal Representative of the Estate of Walterio G. Romero, Property Owner
- Laurel A. Herrmann for the San Carlos Apache Tribe
- Michael Carter for the Gila River Indian Community
- Susan Montgomery for the Yavapai Apache Nation and observing for the Pasqua Yaqui Tribe
- Katrina Wilkinson for Salt River Project (SRP)
- John D. Burnside for BHP Copper
- Karen Nielsen for Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR)
- Alexander Ritchie, Attorney General for the San Carlos Apache Tribe
- Kaitlyn Smith for ASARCO
- Amanda Eubanks for the United States Department of Justice

Ms. Romero-Sims explains to the Court why she was not able to meet with ADWR. Ms. Romero-Sims apologizes to the Court and states that she has found documents in her possession regarding both wells on her property. She also spoke to Mr. Jackson with ADWR and understands that the wells were renewed in 1988.

The Court will include on today's minute entry the same links as in previous minute entries to assist Mr. Romero-Sims in filing the necessary paperwork with ADWR. Both the statement of claimant and basis of right need to be resolved before moving forward.

The Court further explains to Mr. Romero-Sims the process of claiming the existence of water rights on the property and the documentation needed to resolve any issues.

The Court will allow Ms. Romero-Sims an additional sixty (60) days to review the documentation in this matter and to further pursue her water rights, at which time another status conference will be set.

10:44 a.m. Matter concludes.

#### **LATER:**

**IT IS ORDERED** that Ms. Romero-Simms shall file a written status report with the Court no later than **Monday, March 10, 2025**, regarding how she would like to proceed, including a proposed schedule for resolving any remaining issues or objections regarding potential water rights on her property. Once the Special Master receives this report a follow-up status conference will be scheduled.

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Arizona regulates surface water and groundwater differently. Surface water is governed by the doctrine of "prior appropriation", which means that the first person to divert the water and put it to beneficial use has the senior right to that water. All subsequent water users have a junior right to the water and can only use the water as long as there is enough to fulfill all the senior rights first. Groundwater is governed by the doctrine of "reasonable use." A property owner may extract as much groundwater as can be reasonably used for a beneficial use.

However, case law as a result of the General Stream Adjudication has developed the legal concept of "subflow" - water that flows underground, but exists so close to, or reacts so directly with, a surface stream that the water is actually a part of that surface stream and not a separately distinguishable groundwater source. In 1993, the Arizona Supreme Court agreed that subflow can be regulated as surface water, and wells located within the subflow zone are presumed to be pumping surface water. Development of the subflow zone for any particular Arizona river system is a multiple year endeavor completed by the Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) with cooperation from the Arizona Geological

Survey. The April 2014 Revised Subflow Delineation for the San Pedro River, as well as documents prepared by the ADWR as part of the November 1991 Hydrographic Survey Report (“HSR”) and can be found on the ADWR website at:

<https://www.azwater.gov/adjudications>

To pursue water rights, a property owner must both file a Statement of Claimant, and present to the Court evidence of a legal right to the water they claimed on the Statement of Claimant. If the property owner proves to the Court the existence of a legal water right on their property, the Court will recognize enforceable water rights in a “Final Decree.” ARS § 45-257(B).

Objections for this contested case can be found on the General Stream Adjudication website under “Active Cases” at:

<https://www.superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/SuperiorCourt/GeneralStreamAdjudication/docs/W1-11-2329-Objections.pdf>

Parties wishing to move forward with historical water rights claims on their property must ensure Statement of Claimants are current and that documentation of the reason the claim to the water is legally valid, also known as the “basis of right,” is presented to the Court. Additionally, claimants must be able to document the use of the water had not been suspended for any period of five (5) successive years since the use began.

### **1) Statement of Claimants (SOCs)**

A SOC is a landowner’s or lessee’s (“claimant’s”) written statement to the Court that provides details about their water right claim. This claim to use public water is filed with the Arizona Department of Water Resources (“ADWR”). Although a water right generally remains attached to the land, the SOC must reflect the current claimant’s name and contact information as well as any changes to the original claim. The SOC as filed does not list current property owners or lessees. To update an SOC, parties may make an SOC amendment, obtain a SOC assignment from the original claimant, or file a new SOC for their use. See Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 45-254. Forms may be found on ADWR’s website at:

<https://www.azwater.gov/adjudications/statement-claimant-new-use-summons-forms>

### **2) Basis of Right**

To obtain a water right, a claimant must also provide a “basis of right.” A basis of right is a document filed with ADWR either registering a water right, applying for a permit to appropriate water, or applying for a stockpond claim of right. See Arizona Revised Statutes (“Ariz. Rev. Stat.”) §§ 45-182(A), 45-152(A), 45-273. -

If a claimant proves that the water right claimed was initiated prior to June 12,

1919, they do not need to file an “application for a permit to appropriate,” but must present a statement of claim registering their claimed water right and filed prior to, (90 days before the publication of the San Pedro HSR). See Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 45-171, 45-182(A). ***Note that a statement of claim is a different document than a statement of claimant.***

ADWR can help the current property owners determine if former Claimants properly registered the potential water rights claimed on the SOC's for this contested case. If a claimant either cannot prove that the water right claimed was initiated prior to June 12, 1919, or cannot present a statement of *claim* filed prior to August 22, 1991, the claimant must file either an “application for a permit to appropriate public water” or an “application for a stockpond claim of right.” Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 45-152(A), 45-272(C).

If the claimed water right is for a pond constructed before 1977, less than 15 acre-feet, and used solely for watering livestock or wildlife (but not primarily for fishing or culturing of fish), the claimant should file an “application for a stockpond claim of right.” Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 45-271, 45-272. If the claimed water right is for any other use, the claimant must file an “application for a permit to appropriate public water.” Blank forms for either application may be found on the ADWR website at:

<https://www.azwater.gov/surface-water/surface-water-forms-and-documents>.

Because of the time and cost involved in pursuing an “application for a permit to appropriate public water” or an “application for a stockpond claim of right,” claimants should first gather as much evidence as possible to determine which, if any, of their water rights claims are for water uses initiated prior to June 12, 1919, and described in a timely filed statement of *claim*.

Federal land entry case files (e.g. homestead proofs and affidavits) may be useful for proving historical farming and grazing activity on your land. Resources for finding land entry filings are listed below:

- Federal land patents may be found here:  
<https://gloreCORDS.blm.gov/search/default.aspx>
- Pre-1908 homestead proofs may be accessed from a physical FamilySearch location. See <https://locations.familysearch.org/en/search> for more information.
- Any other land entry case files can be ordered using the following form:  
<https://www.archives.gov/forms/pdf/natf-84.pdf>.

### 3) Contact Information

To contact ADWR:

- Statements of claimant application and processing - 1-866-246-1414
  - Email: [smitchell@azwater.gov](mailto:smitchell@azwater.gov)
  - website: <https://www.azwater.gov/adjudications>

- Well Registration – (602) 771-8527
  - Email: [wells@azwater.gov](mailto:wells@azwater.gov)
  - website: <https://www.azwater.gov/permitting-wells>
- Surface Water Permitting (Basis of Rights) – (602) 771-8621
  - Email: [surfacewater@azwater.gov](mailto:surfacewater@azwater.gov)
  - website: <https://www.azwater.gov/surface-water/surface-water-overview>

While it is not necessary, Claimants are free to seek their own legal counsel at any time should they decide to do so. In addition, The Arizona Adjudications Project is taking applications to provide free, limited legal representation in the adjudication. The team can help claimants who are not already represented by an attorney. You can apply for assistance here:

<https://law.arizona.edu/academics/clinical-programs/natural-resource-use-management-clinic/arizona-adjudications-clinic>.

To contact the University of Arizona Adjudications Project call (520) 621 6722 or via email at: [law-azadjudicationsproject@arizona.edu](mailto:law-azadjudicationsproject@arizona.edu).

To contact the Office of the Special Water Master please call (602) 372-4115.