



# Danna Jackson

## NOMINEE

Nominee to the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana

## COURT

District Court

## DATE NOMINATED

April 24, 2024

On April 24, 2024, President Biden [nominated](#) Danna Jackson to the United States District Court for the District of Montana. Jackson serves as Tribal Attorney for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and formerly worked for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. If confirmed, she would be the first Native American individual to serve on the District of Montana.

## Biography

Jackson was born in Hamilton, Montana in 1971. A [first-generation Kootenai descendant](#), she [was raised on](#) a cattle ranch on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Southwest Montana. Jackson earned both her B.A. (1993) and J.D. (1996) from the University of Montana.

## Legal Experience

Jackson began her career as an Associate at Marra Evenson & Levine (“Marra”), a law firm based in Great Falls, Montana. At Marra, Jackson largely litigated civil cases involving workers' compensation, personal injury, and insurance defense. She left the firm in 2000, to serve as a staff attorney for the National Indian Gaming Commission. Her caseload involved Class II gaming cases as well as regulatory violations and FOIA requests.

From 2002-2005, Jackson worked as a legislative assistant for Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD). In the Senator's office, she handled Indian affairs, appropriations, and judiciary matters. She eventually left the Senate to work for prestigious D.C. law firm Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP (“Akin Gump”). At Akin Gump, Jackson litigated complex tribal water law cases and served tribal clients.

In 2010, Jackson returned to her home state, becoming an Assistant U.S. Attorney and Tribal Liaison for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Montana. After six years at the U.S. Attorney's office, she returned to environmental law as Chief Legal Counsel for the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. There, Jackson litigated everything from water law to employment law to road law cases. Inspired by her environmental work, she moved to the Bureau of Land Management in 2021, working as Senior Counsel to the Director. Her docket largely

involved water law and drought management, with a focus on the Mississippi and Columbia River Basins. Today, Jackson works as a tribal attorney for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes.

As illustrated above, Jackson has dedicated her legal career to environmental and federal Indian law – two specialties that are drastically underrepresented on the federal bench. To date, only a handful of judges with environmental law or federal Indian law backgrounds have served on the federal bench. The following three cases are indicative of her legal work:

**1. *Clark Fork Coalition v. Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation*, 403 Mont. 225 (Mont. 2021)**

*As an attorney at the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (“the Department”), Jackson litigated a key water rights issue with significant implications for the state of Montana. A mining company requested a permit allowing it to use a specified amount of groundwater for its mine. After approving the permit, the Department was sued by the Clark Fork Coalition (“the Coalition”). The Coalition alleged that the Department erroneously approved the permit because it did not consider relevant water quality standards. The lower court sided with the Coalition, but the Montana Supreme Court disagreed, holding that the Montana Water Use Act does not require the Department to consider whether the mine’s use of the groundwater complies with Montana Water Quality Act.*

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**2. *In re Buttleman*, Cause No. 5591, 18th Judicial District (Mont. 2019)**

*In this case, the Water Users Organization sued the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to gain ownership over the Willow Creek project, an earth fill structure and reservoir owned and managed by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The project involved the construction of a lucrative high hazard dam. Jackson filed a writ alleging that the Montana Supreme Court should dismiss the case due to a lack of case or controversy. The parties eventually entered mediation, but mediation efforts soon stalled. The plaintiffs then went back to court, stating that the parties reached an agreement in mediation and requesting that the court enforce it. After reviewing the facts, the lower court found that the parties did not enter an agreement. Ultimately, the plaintiffs were unsuccessful, with the Department maintaining ownership of the Willow Creek project.*

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**3. *United States v. Running Crane*, No. 16-3019 (D. Mont.)**

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plaintiffs then went back to court, stating that the parties reached an agreement in mediation and requesting that the court enforce it. After reviewing the facts, the lower court found that the parties did not enter an agreement. Ultimately, the plaintiffs were unsuccessful, with the Department maintaining ownership of the Willow Creek project.

## Professional Activities and Accolades

In 2021, Jackson received the Distinguished Service Award from the State Bar of Montana – a true testament to her impact on the Montana legal community. In 2011, she earned the prestigious FBI Director's Award for Outstanding Service: Indian Country Domestic Violence Initiative. Moreover, she has repeatedly been named one of Best Lawyers' top nationwide attorneys in Indian Law.