

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE DISTRICT OF UTAH

**Lynn D. Becker v. Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray
Reservation; The Uintah and Ouray Tribal Business Committee; Ute
Energy Holdings, LLC**

Becker · No. 2:25-CV-643-DAK-DAO · Decided February 11, 2026

SUMMARY

The United States District Court for the District of Utah considers Lynn D. Becker’s motion for a preliminary injunction seeking to halt related Ute Tribal Court proceedings, along with defendants’ motions to dismiss and strike. The court applies the tribal-exhaustion rule and prior Tenth Circuit decisions involving the parties, concluding that Becker’s claims cannot proceed in federal court before completion of the Tribal Court appellate process. The decision also dismisses Becker’s contract and related claims for lack of federal subject-matter jurisdiction.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	United States District Court for the District of Utah
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Dale A. Kimball
JURISDICTION	United States District Court for the District of Utah
DECIDED	February 11, 2026
DOCKET	2:25-CV-643-DAK-DAO
DISPOSITION	dismissed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiff filed a federal action seeking declaratory relief concerning exhaustion of tribal remedies and asserting contract and related claims. He moved for a preliminary injunction to enjoin ongoing Tribal Court proceedings. Defendants moved to dismiss under Rule 12(b) and Ute Energy Holdings moved to strike under Rule 12(f).
STANDARD OF REVIEW	A preliminary injunction requires the movant to establish substantial likelihood of success on the merits, irreparable injury, a favorable balance of harms, and consistency with the public interest. The court considered the Rule 12(b) motion together with the likelihood-of-success issue. Rule 12(f) motions to strike are generally disfavored, although the court may strike scandalous or unsupported allegations when appropriate.

PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	unpublished district court memorandum decision and order
PARTIES	Lynn D. Becker v. Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, The Uintah and Ouray Tribal Business Committee, Ute Energy Holdings, LLC

TOPICS

tribal jurisdiction tribal sovereignty injunctions motions to dismiss civil procedure

PRACTICE AREAS

federal Indian law tribal jurisdiction civil procedure preliminary injunctions contracts

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether Becker's contract, equitable, and negligence claims could proceed in federal court after related state-law claims had previously been dismissed for lack of subject-matter jurisdiction.
2. Whether the tribal-exhaustion rule required dismissal of Becker's declaratory claims before completion of proceedings in the Tribal Court and its appellate system.
3. Whether Becker established the elements required for a preliminary injunction against the Tribal Court proceedings.
4. Whether the allegations in Becker's Complaint should be stricken under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(f).

HOLDINGS

1. The court dismissed Becker's breach-of-contract, breach-of-covenant, unjust-enrichment, quantum-meruit, and knowing-and-reckless-negligence claims for lack of federal subject-matter jurisdiction because the Tenth Circuit had already held that the related state-law claims did not support federal jurisdiction.
2. The tribal-exhaustion rule required dismissal without prejudice of Becker's declaratory claims because the Tribal Court proceedings and tribal appellate review had not been completed.
3. Becker failed to establish that an exception to the tribal-exhaustion rule applied based on express jurisdictional prohibitions, futility or delay, bad faith, or harassment.
4. Becker was not entitled to a preliminary injunction because he could not show a substantial likelihood of success on the merits or irreparable harm, and enjoining the Tribal Court proceedings would conflict with the public interest in following controlling appellate mandates.
5. The court denied the Rule 12(f) motion to strike the entire Complaint and the specified paragraphs because, although the allegations were speculative and unsupported, the defendants had countered them with evidence and striking them was unnecessary.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“Becker cannot keep bringing the same issues before this court. Becker needs to abide by Becker II and Becker III.”

“Becker II and Becker III govern the present action, and the court dismisses this case without prejudice until Becker exhausts his Tribal remedies through the tribal district court and appellate process.”

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Becker, a non-Indian, entered an Independent Contractor Agreement with the Tribe concerning compensation tied to revenues from tribal oil and gas activities. The Agreement included purported waivers of tribal sovereign immunity and provisions concerning jurisdiction, but it was not approved by the federal government. The parties have engaged in a twelve-year dispute involving multiple federal, state, and Tribal Court proceedings, and the Tribal Court action remains unresolved at the trial and appellate levels. Becker filed this federal action shortly before a rescheduled Tribal Court trial, seeking to avoid further exhaustion and to enjoin the Tribal Court proceedings.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Becker previously litigated related disputes in federal, state, and Tribal Courts. The Tenth Circuit previously held that the tribal-exhaustion rule required dismissal of Becker's earlier federal action without prejudice until the Tribal Court and its appellate system had completed review. In this action, the district court dismissed Becker's contract and related claims for lack of subject-matter jurisdiction, dismissed his declaratory claims without prejudice under the tribal-exhaustion rule, denied his preliminary-injunction motion, and denied the motion to strike.

DISPOSITION

dismissed

CASES CITED

- Becker v. Ute Indian Tribe, 770 F.3d 944 (10th Cir. 2014)
- Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation v. Lawrence, 875 F.3d 539, 548 (10th Cir. 2017)
- Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation v. Lawrence, 22 F.4th 892, 906-10 (10th Cir. 2022)
- Becker v. Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, 868 F.3d 1199, 1203-05 (10th Cir. 2017)
- Becker v. Ute Indian Tribe of Uintah and Ouray Reservation, 11 F.4th 1140, 1150 (10th Cir. 2021), cert. denied, 143 S. Ct. 273 (2022)
- Montana v. United States, 450 U.S. 544, 565-66 (1981)
- Beltronics USA, Inc. v. Midwest Inventory Distribution, LLC, 562 F.3d 1067, 1070 (10th Cir. 2009)
- Heideman v. South Salt Lake City, 348 F.3d 1182, 1188-89 (10th Cir. 2003)
- First Western Capital Management Co. v. Malamed, 874 F.3d 1136, 1141 (10th Cir. 2017)
- Winter v. Natural Resources Defense Council, 555 U.S. 7, 24 (2008)
- Crowe & Dunlevy, P.C. v. Stidham, 640 F.3d 1140, 1149 (10th Cir. 2011)

- National Farmers Union Insurance Cos. v. Crow Tribe of Indians, 471 U.S. 845, 856 n.21 (1985)
- Thlopthlocco Tribal Town v. Stidham, 762 F.3d 1226, 1238 (10th Cir. 2014)
- Iowa Mutual Insurance Co. v. LaPlante, 480 U.S. 9, 17 (1987)
- Hohensee v. Watson, 188 F. Supp. 941, 943 (M.D. Pa. 1959)
- Yazzie v. Ute Indian Tribe

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