

Office of the Secretary, Interior

§ 30.122

(d) Approve or disapprove a will disposing of trust or restricted property;

(e) Accept or reject any full or partial renunciation of interest in either a testate or intestate proceeding;

(f) Approve or disapprove any consolidation agreement;

(g) Conduct sales at probate and provide for the distribution of interests in the probate decision and order;

(h) Allow or disallow claims by creditors;

(i) Order the distribution of trust property to heirs and devisees and determine and reserve the share to which any potential heir or devisee who is missing but not found to be deceased is entitled;

(j) Determine whether a tribe has jurisdiction over the trust or restricted property and, if so, the right of the tribe to receive a decedent's trust or restricted property under 25 U.S.C. 2206(a)(2)(B)(v), 2206(a)(2)(D)(iii)(IV), or other applicable law;

(k) Issue subpoenas for the appearance of persons, the testimony of witnesses, and the production of documents at hearings or depositions under 25 U.S.C. 374, on the judge's initiative or, within the judge's discretion, on the request of an interested party;

(l) Administer oaths and affirmations;

(m) Order the taking of depositions and determine the scope and use of deposition testimony;

(n) Order the production of documents and determine the scope and use of the documents;

(o) Rule on matters involving interrogatories and any other requests for discovery, including requests for admissions;

(p) Grant or deny stays, waivers, and extensions;

(q) Rule on motions, requests, and objections;

(r) Rule on the admissibility of evidence;

(s) Permit the cross-examination of witnesses;

(t) Appoint a guardian ad litem for any interested party who is a minor or found by the judge not to be competent to represent his or her own interests;

(u) Regulate the course of any hearing and the conduct of witnesses, inter-

ested parties, attorneys, and attendees at a hearing;

(v) Determine and impose sanctions and penalties allowed by law; and

(w) Take any action necessary to preserve the trust assets of an estate.

§ 30.121 May a judge appoint a master in a probate case?

(a) In the exercise of any authority under this part, a judge may appoint a master to do all of the following:

(1) Conduct hearings on the record as to all or specific issues in probate cases as assigned by the judge;

(2) Make written reports including findings of fact and conclusions of law; and

(3) Propose a recommended decision to the judge.

(b) When the master files a report under this section, the master must also mail a copy of the report and recommended decision to all interested parties.

§ 30.122 Is the judge required to accept the master's recommended decision?

No, the judge is not required to accept the master's recommended decision.

(a) An interested party may file objections to the report and recommended decision within 30 days of the date of mailing. An objecting party must simultaneously mail or deliver copies of the objections to all other interested parties.

(b) Any other interested party may file responses to the objections within 15 days of the mailing or delivery of the objections. A responding party must simultaneously mail or deliver a copy of his or her responses to the objecting party.

(c) The judge will review the record of the proceedings heard by the master, including any objections and responses filed, and determine whether the master's report and recommended decision are supported by the evidence of record.

(1) If the judge finds that the report and recommended decision are supported by the evidence of record and are consistent with applicable law, the judge will enter an order adopting the recommended decision.

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(2) If the judge finds that the report and recommended decision are not supported by the evidence of record, the judge may do any of the following:

(i) Remand the case to the master for further proceedings consistent with instructions in the remand order;

(ii) Make new findings of fact based on the evidence in the record, make conclusions of law, and enter a decision; or

(iii) Hear the case de novo, make findings of fact and conclusions of law, and enter a decision.

(3) The judge may find that the master's findings of fact are supported by the evidence in the record but the conclusions of law or the recommended decision is not consistent with applicable law. In this case, the judge will issue an order adopting the findings of fact, making conclusions of law, and entering a decision.

§ 30.123 Will the judge determine matters of status and nationality?

(a) The judge in a probate proceeding will determine:

(1) The status of eligible heirs or devisees as Indians;

(2) If relevant, the nationality or citizenship of eligible heirs or devisees; and

(3) Whether any of the Indian heirs or devisees with U.S. citizenship are individuals for whom the supervision and trusteeship of the United States has been terminated.

(b) A judge may make determinations under this section in a current probate proceeding or in a completed probate case after a reopening without regard to a time limit.

§ 30.124 When may a judge make a finding of death?

(a) A judge may make a finding that an heir, devisee, or person for whom a probate case has been opened is deceased, by reason of extended unexplained absence or other pertinent circumstances. The judge must include the date of death in the finding. The judge will make a finding of death only on:

(1) A determination from a court of competent jurisdiction; or

(2) Clear and convincing evidence.

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(b) In any proceeding to determine whether a person is deceased, the following rebuttable presumptions apply:

(1) The absent person is presumed to be alive if credible evidence establishes that the absent person has had contact with any person or entity during the 6-year period preceding the hearing; and

(2) The absent person is presumed to be deceased if clear and convincing evidence establishes that no person or entity with whom the absent person previously had regular contact has had any contact with the absent person during the 6 years preceding the hearing.

§ 30.125 May a judge reopen a probate case to correct errors and omissions?

(a) On the written request of an interested party, or on the basis of the judge's own order, at any time, a judge has the authority to reopen a probate case to:

(1) Determine the correct identity of the original allottee, or any heir or devisee;

(2) Determine whether different persons received the same allotment;

(3) Decide whether trust patents covering allotments of land were issued incorrectly or to a non-existent person; or

(4) Determine whether more than one allotment of land had been issued to the same person under different names and numbers or through other errors in identification.

(b) The judge will notify interested parties if a probate case is reopened and will conduct appropriate proceedings under this part.

§ 30.126 What happens if property was omitted from the inventory of the estate?

This section applies when, after issuance of a decision and order, it is found that trust or restricted property or an interest therein belonging to a decedent was not included in the inventory.

(a) A judge can issue an order modifying the inventory to include the omitted property for distribution under the original decision. The judge must furnish copies of any modification