

2026 ELECTION
GUIDE



**THE POLL
BOOK JUDGE**



The Poll Book Judge

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Disclaimer: This guide does not cover all election duties and responsibilities. Election Administrators and Election Judges are obligated to follow Montana law.

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The Poll Book Judge



There are few roles as critical to our democracy as the job of an election judge. On election day, a citizen’s right to cast a ballot and have the vote count rests in the hands of the election judge.

The poll book is the official record used to reconcile the number of electors with the ballots issued. After the Register Judge processes the elector, the Poll Book Judge writes the elector’s name in the poll book beside the ballot number provided by the Ballot Judge.

Ballot numbers should not be pre-entered. The number on the next ballot stub must match the number in the poll book. If a ballot number is missing from the ballot or if a ballot is voided, this must be clearly noted in the poll book.

Missing or Blank Ballots

For example, if the next sequential ballot is missing, the Poll Book Judge must note this by writing “**missing**” next to the number in the poll book.

If the ballot is missing a number due to misprint, the Ballot Judge will fold and place it in a “**spoiled**” ballot envelope. The envelope is then placed in the ballot box with the stub attached. The Ballot Judge will verify the next ballot has the correct sequential number. If not, these steps will be repeated for the next ballot.

Spoiled Ballots

[\(13-13-117, MCA\)](#)

When an elector spoils or damages their ballot, the Poll Book Judge will coordinate with the Ballot Judge to document the spoiled ballot and enter the elector’s new ballot number in the poll book.

A new ballot must be provided to the elector upon request. There is no limit to the number of ballots an elector can receive to replace spoiled ballots.

- The elector should return the spoiled ballot enclosed in the secrecy sleeve, or folded with the stub showing, to the Ballot Judge.
- The Ballot Judge will instruct the elector to write “**spoiled**” on the ballot and then, without violating the secrecy of the ballot, the Ballot Judge will write

“spoiled” on the stub of the spoiled ballot. The Ballot Judge will remove the stub and place it in the stub box.

Note: In a partisan *primary election*, the Ballot Judge will write “spoiled” on the stubs of each party ballot for the election, remove them, and place them in the stub box. Voted spoiled ballots are deposited in the “spoiled” envelope in the ballot box or stub box as directed by the Election Administrator. Unvoted spoiled ballot(s) are deposited in the box for unvoted ballots. A new set of party ballots is then issued.

- The elector will place the spoiled ballot in an envelope marked “spoiled.”
- **Note:** Election judges should not place the ballot in the spoiled ballot envelope due to the possibility of the loss of secrecy of the ballot.
- The Ballot Judge will instruct the Poll Book Judge to mark the poll book accordingly for the spoiled ballot. The word “spoiled” must be noted beside the elector’s name for that ballot number in the poll book.
- The Ballot Judge will give the elector a new ballot and announce the new ballot number to the Poll Book Judge to record in the poll book.
- **Note:** Stickers or labels *may not* be placed by an election judge or elector to cover up or correct errors on the spoiled ballot. A new ballot must be issued.

Ballot Reconciliation

At the end of the day, the poll book must be reconciled with the number of ballots issued using the [Ballot Reconciliation Report](#).

Note: If there is early pickup of ballots for counting, additional poll books will be required.

- The Poll Book Judge will start subsequent poll books where the prior poll book finished.
- All judges must sign the poll book(s) before each pickup.
- The [Ballot Reconciliation Report](#) is completed before the poll book and ballots are released for counting.



Ballot Reconciliation Report
This form is included in the back of each poll book and is used to reconcile ballots on Election Day.

COUNTY _____ PRECINCT _____

PART 1

| | | |
|--|-------|--|
| 1. Last ballot number issued | _____ | Ballot Reconciliation Report – Find this form at the back of each poll book. 2 copies are required. One copy is to be sealed and returned with each poll book and one copy is for the Election Administrator. |
| 2. Subtract Void and Spoiled Ballots | _____ | |
| 3. Subtotal | _____ | |
| 4. Subtract number of ballots reserved for Absentee voting – see Certificate of Number of Ballots Sent to Polling Place Form (use the number from that form) | _____ | |
| 5. Total number of paper ballots issued | _____ | |

PART 2

| | | |
|--|-------|------------------------------|
| 6. Total number of paper ballots issued (same as Part 1, #5) | _____ | These 2 totals should match. |
| 7. Subtract total number of unresolved provisional ballots | _____ | |
| 8. Total number of ballots less unresolved provisional ballots | _____ | |

PART 3

9. Total number of ballots in ballot box (sheet 1) _____ * (sheet 2) _____

This total should be the actual number of ballots counted – the number of sheet 1 and sheet 2 ballots may be different.
* #8 and #9 should match. If they do not, fill out the reason below.

If the number of ballots hand-counted does not reconcile with the number of ballots from the poll book ballot reconciliation, detail below how many ballots are short or in excess and the reason for the discrepancy (if known):

Signatures of Judges:
