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## Justices invalidate Idaho's redistricting map

The Idaho Supreme Court has rejected the proposed map for redrawing the state's legislative districts, a decision that sends the bipartisan committee that created the new boundaries back to work on a tight deadline with just five weeks before the official start of election season.

The justices issued a ruling Wednesday in a lawsuit filed by Twin Falls County against the plan approved in October by the second of two redistricting committees charged with reconfiguring Idaho's 35 legislative districts.

In its legal challenge, Twin Falls County argued that its voters would be put at a disadvantage because the map split the county into two separate legislative districts.

Twin Falls County Prosecutor Grant Loeb told justices earlier this month that the state constitution gives the redistricting commission latitude to split counties only in cases when it's necessary to meet the one-person, one-vote federal standard. Any additional splitting, even to keep communities together, is unnecessary, he said.

Four of the five supreme court justices agreed, finding that a plan that divides 12 of Idaho's 44 counties violates the state constitution. "Because (the) plan divides more counties than is required to do so, it violates ... the Idaho Constitution and is therefore invalid," according to an opinion written by Chief Justice Daniel Eisman and supported by justices Roger Burdick, Warren Jones and Joel Horton.

Justice Jim Jones was the lone dissenter, arguing instead that the state constitution grants redistricting panels wide discretion to draw legislative boundaries as it sees fit. In the past, the court has also granted substantial deference to decisions made by the redistricting commission.

"In my view, the Commission performed in an exemplary fashion," Jones wrote. "It made detailed findings of fact, clearly explaining how the plan was developed, the steps it took to comply with one-person, one-vote requirements, its rationale for dividing or splitting counties, and how it applied the legislative guidelines."

Secretary of State Ben Ysursa was meeting with Brian Kane, the chief deputy attorney general who argued in favor of the plan in front of the justices. Neither could be immediately reached for comment by The Associated Press on Wednesday afternoon. The court's decision essentially forces the redistricting commission to get back to work to put together a new set of legislative boundaries.

The lawsuit filed by Twin Falls County is one of several targeting the commission's plan. But court officials say the decision in the Twin Falls County case renders all others moot. Candidates for this season's state legislative races can begin filing on Feb. 27. Idaho's primary election is scheduled for May 15.