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Minneapolis, MN 55401

April 10, 2023

—Via Electronic Filing—

Will Seuffert
Executive Secretary
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission
121 7th Place East, Suite 350
St. Paul, MN 55101

RE: REPLY COMMENTS
IN THE MATTER OF A COMMISSION INVESTIGATION INTO THE POTENTIAL
ROLE OF THIRD-PARTY AGGREGATION OF RETAIL CUSTOMERS
DOCKET NO. E999/CI-22-600

Dear Mr. Seuffert:

Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy, submits the enclosed Reply Comments to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission in response to the December 9, 2022 Notice of Comment Period in this docket.

We have electronically filed this document with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, and copies have been served on the parties on the attached service list. Please contact Taige Tople at 612-216-7953 or taige.d.tople@xcelenergy.com or contact me at 612-330-7974 or christopher.j.shaw@xcelenergy.com if you have any questions regarding this filing.

Sincerely,

/s/

CHRIS SHAW
REGULATORY POLICY MANAGER

Enclosure
cc: Service List

STATE OF MINNESOTA
BEFORE THE
MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Katie J. Sieben	Chair
Valerie Means	Commissioner
Matthew Schuerger	Commissioner
Joseph K. Sullivan	Commissioner
John A. Tuma	Commissioner

IN THE MATTER OF A COMMISSION
INVESTIGATION INTO THE POTENTIAL
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OF RETAIL CUSTOMERS

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REPLY COMMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Northern States Power Company, doing business as Xcel Energy, submits these Reply Comments to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission in response to the December 9, 2022 Notice of Comment Period in this docket. The Company appreciates this opportunity to provide Reply Comments on the Commission's questions regarding whether Aggregators of Retail Customers (ARCs) should be able to bid demand response (DR) resources directly into wholesale markets, participate in utility-structured retail DR programs, and whether consumer protections such as an ARC registration or verification process would be needed.

Initial Comments were provided by the Department of Commerce (Department), utilities (Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power, Otter Tail Power Company, Dakota Electric Association, Great River Energy), joint comments by various commenters (Joint Commenters), customers and customer representatives (Minnesota Large Industrial Group (MLIG), Walmart, Inc.), non-governmental organizations (RMI, Clean Energy Economy Minnesota (CEEM), Sierra Club, et al. (Sierra Club), R Street Institute), an ARC and ARC representatives (Voltus, Inc., Advance Energy Management Alliance, et al. (AEMA), and product sellers and product seller representatives (Armada Power, LLC, Minnesota Solar Energy Industries Association (MnSEIA), SwitchDin, Sunrun, Inc., Recurve Analytics, Inc.). In this Reply, we address topics raised by parties, including the validity of the Commission's 2010 opt-out order, market dynamics in DR, and the Company's compliance with the Commission's Order to obtain 400 megawatts (MW) of DR.

We appreciate the Department's thoughtful analysis and agree with the Department's recommendations of (1) not to allow ARCs to bid DR into wholesale markets and (2) take no further action on the remaining questions. Since the Commission's May 10, 2010 Order already prohibits ARCs from operating in Minnesota, we believe these recommendations can both be implemented best by the Commission taking no action at this time.

Regarding whether the Commission should reverse its decision and allow ARCs to bid DR into wholesale markets, we believe it would be premature while the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is considering whether states should have the ability to opt out of ARC participation in the DR wholesale market, and while the groundwork is being laid for the complexities of FERC Order 2222 implementation. In addition, lifting the current Commission prohibition would not result in just and reasonable rates for customers if existing DR resources are lost to ARCs from utilities' programs and would not be in the public interest because it could reduce the efficiency of long-standing utility DR programs.

Additionally, we believe it would be premature to require utilities to allow ARC participation in retail DR programs until the Company's Peak Flex Credit pilot, which allows ARCs, has completed and results and lessons learned can be reported back to the Commission.

If, however, the Commission still wishes to act and decides either to allow ARCs to bid DR into MISO or to institute a new state program requiring utilities to allow ARCs to participate in retail DR programs, then the Company recommends that the Commission create a verification and/or certification process and institute consumer protection through an appropriate rulemaking process.

REPLY COMMENTS

I. SHOULD THE COMMISSION PERMIT AGGREGATORS OF RETAIL CUSTOMERS TO BID DR INTO ORGANIZED MARKETS?

As discussed in the Introduction, we agree with the Department's recommendation that the Commission should not reverse its prohibition and allow ARCs to bid DR into wholesale markets.

First, reversing the prohibition would be premature given that FERC is currently reconsidering whether states should have the ability to opt out of DR participation in wholesale markets and that the groundwork for implementing FERC Order 2222 in a

manner that protects the safety and reliability of the distribution system while minimizing costs to customers is currently being laid.

Second, leaving the policy in place is in the public interest, because reversing it could reduce the efficiency of long-standing utility DR programs and increase costs to customers broadly. We agree with the Department's concern that allowing ARCs to bid DR into MISO would likely take DR resources from utilities' programs, requiring utilities to incur costs in replacing that DR, which in turn would result in higher costs in retail rates. To the extent that ARCs organize DR capacity not currently participating in utility programs, this would result in a lower level of potential DR for new utility programs to access and, to the extent that new DR is a cost-effective resource to meet customer needs, then the loss of DR to ARCs would again raise overall retail rates.

As detailed in the Comments submitted by the Company and other utilities such as Minnesota Power, Otter Tail Power, Great River Energy, and Dakota Electric, utilities have developed extensive and reliable DR programs. These programs function in a manner similar to ARCs to facilitate coordinated and effective retail DR, thereby enhancing efficient utilization of existing capacity and reserves.

There are additional concerns as well. Allowing ARCs to bid DR directly into MISO would make utilities' long-term integrated resource planning efforts more complex and less reliable because of the uncertainty of the amount of DR that could be relied upon to meet planning needs. The Company agrees with the Joint Commenters that it would be more challenging for a utility to accurately assess future needs. This uncertainty could force utilities to purchase or acquire additional resources, at a potentially higher cost, which would also result in upward pressure on retail rates.

Allowing ARCs to control disparately located loads risks the accuracy of utility distribution planning and load forecasting at the local distribution level. Without sufficient locational granularity of aggregations by third party ARCs, the utility will struggle to accurately forecast and plan for the load at the distribution level. As an additional complication, the operational status of the ARC's DR resources would be determined by the economic incentives of the ARC and may not consider typical load or generation profiles.

We share the concern expressed by the Joint Commenters regarding the differences in oversight and consumer protections between Minnesota's regulated utilities and ARCs. Utilities are required to provide nondiscriminatory service, and unlike ARCs, are subject to oversight to ensure they do so. Customers could be at higher risk of predatory or strong-armed practices to sign up for ARC programs. Moreover, there is

information asymmetry between customers and ARCs. Engaging with a third-party provider would necessarily involve a wide range of factors including incentives to reduce energy use during certain hours, the automatic suspension of electricity service to retail customers during certain peak times, and potential penalties. Customers, including vulnerable populations, would need to engage in substantial research to be fully informed.

Parties who commented in favor of allowing ARCs to bid DR into MISO made several arguments, which we address here.

A. The Commission Has the Authority to Prohibit the Demand Response Services Offered by ARCs to Minnesota Utility Customers.

The Sierra Club claims that the Commission must rescind its May 18, 2010 Order in Docket E-999/CI-09-1449, which prohibits ARCs from operating with the service territory of utilities selling more than 4 million megawatt hours per year from bidding into wholesale markets, because the Commission lacks authority in Minnesota law to prohibit these services from non-utility entities, such as ARCs.¹ To make this argument, the Sierra Club relies on an excessively narrow interpretation of the Commission's authority, which conflicts with the Commission's May 10, 2010 Order. This Order was not challenged and has remained accepted policy for nearly 13 years.

Contrary to the Sierra Club's claim, the Commission's decision to prohibit ARCs was based on a full record that included thoughtful analysis of the Commission's authority. Minnesota's regulatory structure provides the Commission with clear authority to prohibit ARCs from marketing their demand response products to utility customers. For these reasons, the Sierra Club's argument should be rejected.

- 1. The Commission Correctly Determined That it Has Authority to Prohibit ARCs When it Decided to Prohibit Them in 2010.*

The Sierra Club claims that the Commission "avoided answering" what it refers to as "the predicate legal question of what authority it has" to regulate ARCs when it issued its May 10, 2010 Order. This is not true. The Commission solicited comments on this very topic and made its decision to prohibit ARCs based on a thorough record that included extensive discussion of the Commission's authority over the energy conservation and demand response services offered by ARCs.

¹ In addition to the arguments made by the Sierra Club, the MLIG and Voltus have each made brief suggestions that the Commission's authority to regulate ARCs is not clear. *See* MLIG Comments at 9; Voltus Comments at 17.

The Commission’s January 13, 2010 Notice of Comment Period opening docket E-999/CI-09-1449 requested comment on a variety of topics related to ARCs. Question 3 of the Notice explicitly addressed the question of the Commission’s authority over the demand response services offered by ARCs:

3. What, if any, Minnesota laws, rules, and/or Commission orders could prohibit or restrict ARCs from aggregating utility customers in Minnesota? For example, would the operation of ARCs in Minnesota create the opportunity for rate discrimination?

In response to this question, different parties provided arguments for and against the Commission’s authority over the services offered by ARCs. For instance, the Company explained that the Commission could and should regulate ARCs because they provided regulated demand response services: “ARCs would furnish services to retail customers in Minnesota by aggregating demand response, just as the Company now aggregates retail demand response to reduce the need to produce or purchase capacity or energy in the Midwest ISO regional energy market.”² The Company further noted that “[u]nder longstanding Commission and statutory policy, the provision of electric service in Minnesota includes the provision of demand response and conservation services”³ Other parties provided similar comments explaining the Commission’s authority to regulate or prohibit ARCs.

The Commission also received comments arguing the opposite position. For instance, EnerNOC, Inc. (“EnerNOC”) argued that ARCs are not utilities under Minnesota law—an argument now advanced by the Sierra Club.⁴ EnerNOC further claimed that ARCs should be allowed to sell their services to utility customers because Minnesota’s energy conservation statutes did not restrict conservation efforts to utilities.⁵ As a result, EnerNOC asked that the Commission “permit ARCs to participate in its jurisdictional service territories” or “[a]t a minimum . . . consider allowing ARCs, temporarily, to determine what, if any, affect [ARCs have] to utilities and their customers.”⁶ Notably, EnerNOC did not take the extreme position taken here by the Sierra Club and argue that the Commission had no authority to regulate

² *In the Matter of an Investigation of Whether the Commission Should Take Action on Demand Response Bid Directly into the MISO Markets by Aggregators of Retail Customers Under FERC Orders 719 and 719-A*, MPUC Docket No. E-999/CI-09-1449, Comments of Xcel Energy at 5 (Feb. 16, 2010).

³ *Id.* at 6.

⁴ See *In the Matter of an Investigation of Whether the Commission Should Take Action on Demand Response Bid Directly into the MISO Markets by Aggregators of Retail Customers Under FERC Orders 719 and 719-A*, MPUC Docket No. E-999/CI-09-1449, Reply Comments of at 7 (March 8, 2010).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.* at 15.

ARCs to protect utility customers. Rather, EnerNOC acknowledged the Commission's need "to ensure that direct participation is in the public interest, protects ratepayers and result in fair treatment for jurisdictional-IOUs". In contrast, the Sierra Club appears to believe that the Commission is powerless to protect the public interest from any drawbacks of allowing ARCs the unfettered ability to solicit Minnesota's retail utility customers.

In any event, the Commission's authority to regulate ARCs was thoroughly discussed and considered by the Commission when it issued its May 10, 2010 Order prohibiting them from operating in Minnesota. That decision was not challenged. The Sierra Club's claim, now thirteen years later, that the Commission "avoided answering" the question of its authority to prohibit ARCs ignores the decision itself and the underlying record.

2. *The Commission Continues to have Authority to Prohibit ARCs from Serving Minnesota's Utility Customers.*

As the Commission previously found, the regulatory structure established in Minnesota law provides clear authority for it to prohibit ARCs. As explained in the record leading to the Commission's May 10, 2010 Order, ARCs provide demand response and energy conservation services, which have both been regulated by the Commission under explicit statutory authority granted by the Minnesota legislature.

The Sierra Club and others, however, attempt to distinguish the demand response services that ARCs provide from the same services provided and regulated by utilities. These efforts are misplaced. Demand response and energy conservation services are, under Minnesota law, utility resources that the Department and the Commission regulate under explicit authority from the legislature. The legislature has found that "energy savings are an energy resource" and that "optimizing the timing and method used by energy consumers to manage energy use provides significant benefits to the consumers and to the utility system as a whole."⁷ As a result, the legislature concluded that "cost-effective energy savings and load management programs should be procured *systematically and aggressively* in order to reduce utility costs for businesses and residents. . . ."⁸ To do so "[a] *utility* is encouraged to design and offer load management programs" that maximize the economic value of energy purchased from the utility, and optimize utility infrastructure needed to serve utility customers.⁹ Put differently, the legislature has found that demand response resources are a utility

⁷ Minn. Stat. § 216B.2401(a).

⁸ Minn. Stat. § 216B.2401(a). (Emphasis added).

⁹ Minn. Stat. § 216B.2401(b). (Emphasis added).

resource that serves utility purposes, and that these assets should be regulated by the agencies that regulate utilities.

The legislature's acknowledgement that demand response is a utility resource underlies the structure it has developed to regulate this service. Demand response and energy conservation services are utility functions overseen and regulated by the Department of Commerce and the Commission.¹⁰ Utilities must file detailed plans with the Department of Commerce that are directed at achieving state energy savings and optimization goals. These plans must include proposed investments and expenditures that utilities plan to make to achieve these goals and are vetted by regulators for their cost-effectiveness and overall benefit.

The regulated conservation and optimization efforts are a fundamental part of the "service" that utilities provide, as defined under Minnesota Statutes section 216B.02. The Sierra Club makes an overly simplified claim that demand response is not a defined "service" because it is the withholding of electricity, rather than the "delivery" of electricity. This argument ignores, however, that providing affordable and reliable electric service in a way that aligns with state energy goals requires extensive utility planning that the Commission regulates, and that planning includes providing demand response resources to utility customers as an energy resource. Under section 216B.2422 of Minnesota Statutes, utilities must file detailed Resource Plans with the Commission for approval. A "Resource Plan" is defined to mean "a set of resource options that a utility could use to meet the *service needs* of its customers over a forecast period."¹¹ The "resource options" that utilities may use to meet their customers service needs include "using, refurbishing, and constructing utility plant and equipment, buying power generated by other entities, *controlling customer loads, and implementing customer energy conservation.*"¹² Likewise, entities that seek to add large energy facilities must demonstrate that the need for these new resources cannot feasibly and economically be met with regulated energy conservation and demand response services.¹³

Put simply, and contrary to the Sierra Club's claims, the applicable Minnesota laws do not separate demand response resources from all the other resources utilized in the provision of regulated utility service. Instead, they are a foundational part of the service that utilities provide and the Commission regulates, no different than the

¹⁰ See Minn. Stat. § 216B.241.

¹¹ Emphasis added.

¹² Emphasis added.

¹³ Minn. Stat. § 216B.243 Subd. 3(8).

poles, wires, and generating units used by utilities to provide electricity to customers. The Sierra Club's proposition – that demand response services provided by ARCs to utility customers should be beyond the regulatory purview of the Commission – would clearly frustrate efforts to have the Commission oversee the orderly planning of utility systems and optimization of utilities' resource portfolios and is not supported by law or Minnesota's overall regulatory structure. For these reasons, the Commission has authority under Minnesota law to prohibit ARCs and other entities that seek to provide demand response products to Minnesota's utility customers, and the Sierra Club's argument to the contrary should be rejected. The Commission's May 10, 2010 Order prohibiting ARCs was based on a thorough record and the Commission's clear authority to regulate demand response resources that are offered to Minnesota utility customers.¹⁴

B. Allowing ARCs to Bid Directly into MISO is not an Effective Way to Increase DR Resources

Several parties claim that allowing ARCs to bid DR directly into MISO would increase the supply of DR resources available. They argue that ARCs can reach broader groups because they are better at marketing, can customize alternative solutions for industrial customers better than utilities to further curtail load, and can reach small residential and commercial customer behind-the-meter resources that may be too small to qualify for a utility's program. Parties further claim that ARCs will bring more DR resources online, because ARCs are free of the structural biases that inevitably hamper DR programs by utilities, and because ARCs can offer value-stacking (providing capacity on top of energy and/or ancillary services)¹⁵ which combined market benefits will draw in more customers.

As discussed previously, however, the Department's logical framework makes short work of this position, even assuming all these claims regarding ARCs' competencies

¹⁴ In addition to its argument that the Commission does not have authority to regulate or prohibit ARCs, the Sierra Club dedicates one paragraph to an alternative argument that the Commission's May 10, 2010 Order is invalid because it "appears to constitute a legislative rule . . ." The Sierra Club provides no meaningful analysis of this claim. Regardless, this argument should also be rejected. The Commission's May 10, 2010 Order was not challenged when it was issued, and has remained valid Commission policy for nearly 13 years.

¹⁵ We note that it is difficult to verify the amount of capacity value that value-stacked resources could bring to utilities while MISO is still defining the rules for FERC Order 2222 implementation. Value stacking, if not used or focused properly, can cause early and/or unplanned erosion in the amount of accredited capacity a resource can offer. For example, if a resource is dispatching more frequently to participate in both energy and ancillary services markets, the amount of the resource available for meeting capacity needs may be diminished, as well as the longevity of the capacity, as the resource's use pattern is fundamentally different. Both impacts would cause a need for additional capacity to be added more quickly than initially planned.

are true. To the extent that ARCs take existing DR customers away from utilities' DR programs, utilities will need to replace them, likely at a higher cost, which will impact retail rates. To the extent that ARCs are attracting new DR, this would result in a lower level of potential DR for new utility programs to access and, to the extent that new DR is expected to be needed, then the loss of DR due to ARCs would again raise overall retail rates. Moreover, the Department's analysis demonstrated that Minnesota has substantial quantities of DR already available, casting further doubt on the benefit of destabilizing existing DR programs for the possibility that allowing ARCs to bid directly into MISO might result in the development of some additional new DR resources.

To the extent that developing new DR is needed and the Commission believes that ARCs are uniquely positioned to accomplish that, the Commission could, pursuant to Question 2, allow ARCs participate within a utility's regulated retail DR program. This would involve less risk to customer rates than allowing ARCs to bid DR directly into wholesale markets.

C. Frequency of DR Use

R Street and Voltus take issue with the frequency with which the DR resources in utilities' programs, including the Company's, are used, claiming that they are considered largely emergency programs and remain mostly uncalled by MISO or the utilities. They argue without specific operational evidence¹⁶ that this results in higher wholesale costs and unnecessarily limits the potential value of demand response.

We first note that customers traditionally participate in DR to save on their electric rate, receive a discount, or to receive an incentive for participation. However, as additional events are called, the percentage of customers that "opt-out" of an event or do not participate increases. DR events can be disruptive or inconvenient for customers, especially large industrial customers who have to incorporate a DR event into their operations, potentially at a high opportunity cost. An ARC program that purports to make frequent calls on the DR resources could alienate customers and thereby reduce the number of DR participants. An ARC must have a significant number of customers in order to call frequent events so as not to find considerable attrition over time. Simply put, there needs to be a large pool of customers – many of whom are already a participant in utility DR programs – to make it beneficial for ARC to participate in Minnesota. This likely will mean a displacement of resources already

¹⁶ This includes the amount of "higher wholesale costs" at hand, the amount that the "potential" value of DR is limited, and whether there are additional operational requirements that would drastically change the customer experience due to increased dispatching or erode other stacked values.

part of existing programs.

Second, the claim that the Company uses its DR program only in emergency situations is untrue. The Company has also used this program for distribution reliability. For example, the Company controlled Saver's Switch load ten times in the last five years (including test events). It also presents an incomplete picture. The parties making this claim cite MPUC IR No. 4 that was filed on January 28, 2020, in which Locational Marginal Prices (LMPs) from MISO's Real-Time market were compared with dispatch data from traditional, long-existing programs. These long-existing programs, however, have some key operational differences from many of our more recently approved programs. Additionally, we note that MISO's Real-Time market is volatile, clearing on a sub-hourly basis in order to balance small demand and supply deviations from the MISO Day-Ahead forward market. High power costs, as indicated by LMPs in the Real-Time (RT) or Day-Ahead (DA) MISO markets, do not always indicate the need for activation of our DR resources. MISO LMPs are a function of not only energy supply and demand, but also market congestion and losses. The activation of demand response resources in one location may not always provide economic benefit to customers if it is not in the area causing high LMPs. As a result, no meaningful conclusions can be derived from a simple comparison of prices from such a spot market with activity from traditional DR programs – which often require advanced notice for customers and are targeted at reducing the utility's annual peak demand.

That said, the Company has been working with MISO to improve the locational use of DR resources. Additionally, the Company is reviewing a new DR program that will provide business customer participants with a market driven price signal. The Company would send offers to participating customers for a specific load reduction amount at a given price and a specific date and time. Customers would have the option to accept or decline the offer or provide a counteroffer. If accepted, the Customer will be responsible for manually meeting this accepted demand reduction during the specified hours. If approved, this program is expected to increase the flexibility of our DR resources to address both system constraints and high-cost periods of time.

The commenters' position also understates the value that DR capacity provides to utilities and their customers, even if uncalled. DR resources provide capacity value to the Company as load modifying resources. As discussed above, these MWs reduce our load obligation and our need to add further generation to our resource mix. Traditionally, regardless of whether an event is called, this capacity serves as a resource rather than adding new generation or contracting for additional resources to meet MISO capacity requirements. As the system becomes more constrained over

time, we anticipate the instances for which these customers are called will increase.

The Company anticipates utilizing DR in a variety of scenarios as we continue our journey to 100 percent carbon-free energy by 2050. DR will need to address longer peak periods, peak periods during winter and shoulder months, more frequent peak events, and changes in renewable resource availability and costs due to the time of day, weather conditions, and costs of fuel. Among these needs, the Company anticipates that DR will play a crucial role in the successful integration of increasing quantities of variable renewable generation.

D. DR Customer Experience

Various parties claim that ARCs would provide a better DR customer experience because of their innovative approaches, technologies, and solutions, the fact that an ARC can provide a single point of contact for large customers with assets in various utilities' territories, and their dedicated customer service teams. Walmart also claims that ARCs can absorb the risk of non-compliance and will shield customers from penalties that a utility would impose.

The Company does not agree that ARCs will provide a better customer experience. As stated in our Initial Comments, although many ARCs operate legitimately, there has been sufficient history with bad actors in this industry to warrant caution.¹⁷ Nor is it clear how ARCs would absorb the risk of non-compliance without building in that risk within their business model. In fact, there is an increased risk that customers would be subject to unfair charges or penalties because their imposition would take place outside the utility-regulated context.

Moreover, even if some ARCs could provide some DR customers a better experience, that should not outweigh the fact that allowing ARCs to take DR customers from utilities' DR programs would negatively affect utilities' ability to provide service at just and reasonable rates for all customers.

Finally, to the extent that the Commission believes that DR customers should have the option to be served by ARCs, ARCs could be allowed to operate within a utility's retail DR program, per Question 2. This would involve less risk to customer rates than allowing ARCs to bid DR directly into wholesale markets.

¹⁷ See Xcel Energy's Initial Comments at 13 n.16.

E. Costs to Customers

Several parties claim that allowing ARCs to bid DR directly into MISO will result in lower retail rates because ARCs will increase the supply of DR resources into MISO, which can reduce the dispatch of more expensive supply, thereby lowering wholesale rates to utilities.

Even if some cost savings result on the wholesale market rate, there almost certainly would be increased costs that utilities would incur to replace DR resources lost to ARCs. To the extent that ARCs add DR into MISO stemming from new DR resources, per Department analysis as discussed previously, this would result in a lower level of potential DR for new utility programs to access and again raise overall retail rates to the extent that additional DR is deemed necessary.

Additionally, the potential cost savings from a lower wholesale rate depends on frequent dispatch of the DR. As discussed previously, customers do not welcome the disruption caused by a DR event. Frequent DR events may result in a loss of DR participants. Moreover, whether lower wholesale rates result in savings to retail customers it is dependent on the location of the impact and whether the Company is a net buyer or seller at a particular time.

F. ARC Participation in Wholesale Markets

Several commenters pointed to examples of states and regions which allow ARC participation in wholesale markets, such as Illinois, Texas, California, New York, Michigan and New England. They also named the City of New Orleans and Australia.

These examples, however, are inapposite given the regulatory context of Minnesota. As discussed in our Initial Comments,¹⁸ utilities in Minnesota are subject both to extensive state-mandated, integrated resource planning processes, and some of the most ambitious DR requirements anywhere in the United States. Unlike some states where electric utility service has been either fully or partially unbundled and where retail competition has been introduced, in Minnesota, electric utility service is fully integrated and subject to traditional cost-based regulation.

Moreover, as discussed previously, ARCs could be allowed to provide their benefits by working within the regulated utility construct, as addressed by Question 2.

¹⁸ See Xcel Energy's Initial Comments at 9.

G. The Company's Efforts in Obtaining DR Resources

The Minnesota Large Industrial Group (MLIG) commented that Xcel Energy lagged in acquiring DR for its programs and only made significant efforts to do so after the request of Advanced Energy Management Alliance (AEMA) to open a docket to expedite implementation of 400 MW of demand response. Xcel Energy was ordered to acquire.

The suggestion that the Company is unmotivated to acquire additional DR and was dragging its heels in complying with the Commission's Order is untrue. To the contrary, the Company has long recognized the importance of DR for the utility. As a leader in demand response efforts, the Company began developing its DR program more than 30 years ago. Currently it has over 470,000 residential and small business customers, and approximately 23,000 commercial and industrial customers. The Company has developed an extremely robust DR program that provides approximately 980 MW of system peak load control (more than 11% of the NSP system total requirements load).

In the past five years, customers have been able to choose from an additional seven demand response programs and pilots now offered by the Company. These programs, plus our existing portfolio, have allowed an additional 160,000 customers to participate in these efforts for capacity of approximately 345 MW.¹⁹ Progress on acquiring an additional 400 MW required by the Commission's Order was hindered by extenuating circumstances as our increased load has not matched the loss of load resulting from customer attrition, namely the impact of the loss of a significantly large customer no longer in operation, the reduction of claimed load per customer (as we update and monitor actual load reduction at customer sites), and the impact of customers reducing load during the pandemic. Despite this, the number of customers participating in demand response continues to increase and the Company remains committed to increasing DR resources. We continue to overcome these obstacles and are on track to deliver 400 MW of DR capacity.

¹⁹ This capacity was filed as part of our Minnesota CIP Status Reports from 2017-2021. The 2022 amount is estimated as the Company continues to finalize the data for our 2022 Minnesota CIP Status Report. These reports can be found here:

https://www.xcelenergy.com/company/rates_and_regulations/filings/minnesota_demand-side_management

II. SHOULD THE COMMISSION REQUIRE RATE-REGULATED ELECTRIC UTILITIES TO CREATE TARIFFS ALLOWING THIRD-PARTY AGGREGATORS TO PARTICIPATE IN UTILITY DEMAND RESPONSE PROGRAMS?

We agree with the Department's recommendation to take no further action on this question at this time. As the Department pointed out, requiring tariffs to allow ARCs to participate in utility DR programs would consume scarce regulatory resources, without a clear benefit. In addition, although the Company believes that third parties might be able to play a role in developing DR resources under certain circumstances, the pilot the Company created to test various options just launched in December of 2022. It would be premature for a state policy shift requiring utilities to allow ARCs participation in their DR programs now instead of waiting for the Company to report data and lessons learned back to the Commission.

Additionally, as noted in Otter Tail Power's Comments, DR and Demand Flexibility are identified in Minn. Stat. §216B.2402 and §216B.241, as part of ECO under "Load Management." Regulated utilities, by statute, are allowed to include these resources as part of their ECO Plans. Recovery of expenses are provided in Minn. Stat. §216B.241 Subd. 2b. and additional incentive plans are encouraged in Subd. 13 (d). Regulated utilities will be filing their first energy conservation plans that specifically fall under the ECO Act on June 1, 2023. Waiting to see how these changes will allow further development of DR may also benefit the long-term use of these resources in Minnesota.

To the extent that Commission wishes to take further action on this issue, however, we recommend that the Commission institute an appropriate regulatory rulemaking procedure. Several parties (e.g., RMI, AEMA, et al., Armada Power, SwitchDin, Sunrun) made detailed recommendations regarding programs and operating conditions utilities should provide to allow ARC participation within their retail DR programs. A comprehensive process is needed to evaluate the array of recommendations and to ensure that ARC participation does not disrupt, interfere with, or risk the ability of utilities to provide reliable, cost-effective service to customers.

Accordingly, the Company disagrees with MLIIG's recommendation that utilities should be required to file tariff language within 60 days of a final order in this docket as premature. Although the Company is open to allowing ARCs to bring loads to its retail programs and is currently working to do so through our Peak Flex Credit pilot, such an order should not precede rulemaking and the implementation of appropriate rules and procedures.

Two parties, R Street and MnSEIA, requested that ARCs be permitted to participate in utility requests for new system needs. The Company does not oppose this participation but notes that there would be logistical issues (e.g., procedures to avoid double-counting load and benefits to customers, ensuring that the DR loads represented by ARCs are within a utility's territory, etc.) as well as regulatory procedure concerns to address. For instance, Minnesota's IRP regulatory framework authorizes the issuance of RFPs for specific resources by type, capacity, and timeframes (such as the solar RFP the Commission authorized for near term solar needs in our IRP). ARC resource requests would need to fit within these RFPs.

We note that Recurve recommended that the Commission direct utilities to study the optimization of the value created by retail and wholesale demand response programs to align compensation with grid benefits. The budget currently approved for the Company's pilot does not accommodate this request, however. The Company has no objection to undertaking this study if cost recovery for it was allowed.

III. SHOULD THE COMMISSION VERIFY OR CERTIFY AGGREGATORS OF RETAIL CUSTOMERS FOR DEMAND RESPONSE OR DISTRIBUTED ENERGY RESOURCES BEFORE THEY ARE PERMITTED TO OPERATE, AND IF SO, HOW?

The Company agrees with the Department's recommendation not to take further action on this issue at this time. The Company believes that it would be premature in light of the complex undertaking of implementing the groundwork for FERC Order 2222, as well as the Company's newly launched pilot allowing ARCs to participate in the Company's retail DR program.

If the Commission were to answer either Question 1 or Question 2 in the affirmative, however, then the Company recommends that the Commission adopt a verification and/or certification process for ARCs, which includes the suggested requirements provided in our Initial Comments. Many parties also recommended that ARCs be subject to some type of a verification and/or certification process and similarly provided their own suggestions for requirements. The Company recommends that the Commission institute a rulemaking procedure to ensure an appropriate verification and/or certification process is adopted based on fair consideration of the proposals.

Some parties argued that registration and/or verification was unnecessary because MISO procedures are sufficient. The Company disagrees. Unlike state commissions, MISO is an independent organization that facilitates wholesale energy markets and transmission planning and has effectively no role in, or authority over, protecting

retail utility customer interests. MISO could only address tariff violations; it would be unable to address a complaint that customers of an ARC were not fairly compensated by an ARC or that an ARC had failed to make appropriate disclosures. This lack of protection could be especially problematic for smaller retail customers, whose load could be aggregated by an ARC into a sufficient load size to participate in MISO. Smaller customers – generally speaking – are less likely to be able to thoroughly vet an ARC’s claims relative to larger customers with dedicated energy management staff.

R Street argued that there is a need for customer data sharing rules and procedures, citing discussions from the original Commission’s Inquiry into Privacy Policies of Rate-Regulated Energy Utilities under Docket No. E,G-999/CI-12-1344. Specifically, R Street stated, “On Aug. 24, 2016, Chief Judge Tammy Pust issued the “Second Report of the Customer Energy Usage Data Workgroup.” The Second Privacy Report contained several recommendations, including the need to develop a Minnesota-specific data sharing framework.” We understand and agree with R Street’s concern that customer privacy should be considered by the Commission. Additional work in this area has been performed since Judge Pust issued her report. Specifically, the Commission opened a second data privacy proceeding under Docket No. E,G-999/M-19-505. This proceeding expanded on the previous, original “Commission Inquiry” docket and established standards for how utilities will and can provide customer energy usage data (CEUD) to third parties. The Company believes these dockets may provide a vehicle for the Commission to consider the privacy implications of allowing ARCs to operate in Minnesota, and what steps should be taken to address potential problems.

Several parties (the Department, Otter Tail Power, MLIIG, Sierra Club, et al., Voltus) questioned whether the Commission has the legal authority over ARCs to require that they undergo a certification and/or a verification process. As discussed previously in response to Question 1, however, the Commission has authority to regulate ARCs seeking to provide DR because, under longstanding Commission and statutory policy, the provision of electric services in Minnesota includes the provision of DR and conservation services. Moreover, DR and energy conservation services are, under Minnesota law, utility resources that the Commission has legislative authority to regulate.²⁰

²⁰ See Minn. Stat. § 216B.241.

IV. ARE ANY ADDITIONAL CONSUMER PROTECTIONS NECESSARY IF AGGREGATORS OF RETAIL CUSTOMERS ARE PERMITTED TO OPERATE?

The Company agrees with the Department's recommendation not to take further action on this issue at this time. However, if the Commission were to allow ARCs to bid DR directly into MISO or require that utilities develop tariffs that allow ARCs to participate in their retail DR programs, then the Company recommends adopting additional customer protections, specifically those stated in the Company's Initial Comments. This is especially important for smaller customers who may not be as well positioned to vet an ARC's claims as larger customers with dedicated energy management staff.

The vast majority of parties also recommend adopting additional consumer protections and provided a number of specific ideas. A rulemaking procedure would likely be necessary to ensure that appropriate customer protections are adopted.

The Sierra Club, et al., questioned whether the Commission had the legal authority to regulate ARCs regarding consumer protections. The Company addressed the question of the Commission's legal authority in response to Question 3.

CONCLUSION

The Company appreciates this opportunity to provide Reply Comments. The Company agrees with the Department's recommendations that ARCs should not be allowed to bid DR directly into MISO. For the reasons stated above, the Company requests that the Commission take no further action on the Commission's previous order prohibiting ARCs from operating in Minnesota or on the remaining questions at this time.

Dated: April 10, 2023

Northern States Power Company

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Ella Giefer, hereby certify that I have this day served copies of the foregoing document on the attached list of persons.

xx by depositing a true and correct copy thereof, properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States mail at Minneapolis, Minnesota

xx electronic filing

DOCKET No. E999/CI-22-600

Dated this 10th day of April 2023

/s/

Ella Giefer
Regulatory Administrator

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