

September 11, 2015

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Daniel P. Wolf  
Executive Secretary  
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission  
121 7<sup>th</sup> Place East, Suite 350  
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-2147

RE: **PUBLIC Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources**  
Docket No. G002/M-15-727

Dear Mr. Wolf:

Attached are the **PUBLIC Comments** of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Department) in the following matter:

Petition of Northern States Power Company (Xcel or Company) for Approval of Changes in Contract Demand Entitlements.

The petition was filed on August 3, 2015. The petitioner on behalf of Xcel is:

Paul J. Lehman  
Manager, Regulatory Compliance and Filings  
Xcel Energy  
414 Nicollet Mall  
Minneapolis, MN 55401

The Department recommends that the Commission:

- approve Xcel's proposed level of demand entitlement, subject to possible adjustment in the Company's November 1, 2015 supplemental filing;
- allow Xcel to recover associated demand costs, subject to possible adjustment in the Company's November 1, 2015 supplemental filing, through the monthly Purchased Gas Adjustment effective November 1, 2015;
- approve changes in the jurisdictional allocation for demand costs.

The Department also recommends that the Company provide, in its November 1, 2015 supplemental filing, an update on any hedging transactions that are entered into for the 2015-2016 heating season.

The Department is available to answer any questions the Commission may have.

Sincerely,

/s/ MICHAEL N. ZAJICEK  
Rates Analyst

MNZ/lt  
Attachment

## BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

PUBLIC COMMENTS OF THE  
MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
DIVISION OF ENERGY RESOURCES

DOCKET NO. G002/M-15-727

## I. SUMMARY OF XCEL'S REQUEST

Northern States Power Company (Xcel or the Company) filed a demand entitlement petition (*Petition*) on August 3, 2015, with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission). The Company requested Commission approval to place the Purchased Gas Adjustment (PGA) changes into effect on November 1, 2015. The Company stated that, in the event that the Commission does not act by November 1, 2015, the Company, pursuant to Minnesota Statute § 216B.16, Subd. 7, Minnesota Rule 7825.2920, and Xcel's PGA tariffs, will provisionally place the PGA changes into effect on November 1, 2015, subject to later Commission approval.

In its *Petition*, Xcel requested approval from the Commission to implement its proposed interstate pipeline transportation, storage entitlement, and other demand-related contracts for 2015-2016 effective November 1, 2015. The Company requested that the adjustments be made through the PGA to reflect changes in its firm pipeline demand entitlement levels<sup>1</sup> as follows:

- increase its Minnesota jurisdictional design-day capacity by 1,533 dekatherms per day (Dth/day), about 0.21 percent (1,533 Dth/715,945 Dth);
- change the capacity resources used to meet the design-day requirements and increase the amount of capacity resources (total entitlements) for Minnesota by 5,234 Dth/day or 0.69 percent (5,234 Dth/756,918 Dth);
- with these changes in Minnesota's need and resources, the reserve margin increases slightly from 5.7 percent to 6.2 percent for Minnesota<sup>2</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> The entitlement levels discussed in Xcel's filing are for the total Minnesota Company which encompasses the combined entitlements for Xcel's Minnesota and North Dakota jurisdictions. Minnesota's portion of the entitlements is the total combined entitlements times the Minnesota allocation factor discussed below. The Department has included Department Attachment 2, which shows the effect of the demand entitlement changes in the Minnesota jurisdiction.

<sup>2</sup> Xcel initially set a reserve margin for the 2014-2015 heating season at 6.3% in Docket No. G002/M-14-654, however, in Xcel's October 31, 2014 Supplemental Comments the Company stated that Viking Gas

- slightly decrease the jurisdictional allocation to Minnesota (rather than North Dakota) to 87.99 percent from 88.42 percent to reflect usage patterns; and
- change its recovery of Supply Reservation fees.

Specifically, Xcel requested the following changes in demand volumes for the total Minnesota Company as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Proposed Changes in Entitlements for Xcel**

Type of Entitlement	Proposed Dth Change	Rate	Months	Proposed Cost Change
NNG TFX (Nov-Mar)	1,105	\$8.6272	5	\$47,665.28
NNG TFX (Apr-Oct)	1,105	\$4.0000	7	\$30,940.00
NNG TFX (Jan-Dec)	1,208	\$3.8000	5	\$32,132.80
NNG TFX (Jan-Dec)	1,208	\$3.8000	7	\$22,952.00
NNG TFX (Nov-Mar)	3,333	\$5.3736	5	\$89,551.04
NNG TFX (Apr-Oct)	3,333	\$4.5000	7	\$104,989.50
NNG TFX (Nov-Mar)	(5,629)	\$15.1530	5	\$(426,481.19)
VGT FT-A (Dec-Feb)	12,428	\$4.7507	3	\$177,125.10
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	(72,213)	\$4.4954	2	\$(649,252.64)
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	72,213	\$5.3593	2	\$774,022.26
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	(29,002)	\$3.3978	2	\$(197,085.99)
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	29,002	\$4.3706	2	\$253,512.28
VGT FT-A (Nov-Mar)	(4,239)	\$3.3978	2	\$(28,806.55)
VGT FT-A (Nov-Mar)	4,239	\$4.3706	2	\$37,053.95
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	(10,000)	\$3.3978	2	\$(67,956.00)
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	10,000	\$4.3706	2	\$87,412.00
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	(15,600)	\$4.4954	2	\$(140,256.48)
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	15,600	\$5.3593	2	\$167,210.16
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	(1,903)	\$3.3978	2	\$(12,932.03)
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	1,903	\$4.3706	2	\$16,634.50
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	(15,000)	\$4.4954	2	\$(134,862.00)
VGT FT-A (Jan-Dec)	15,000	\$5.3593	2	\$160,779.00
ANR FTS (Nov-Mar)	(9,248)	\$14.6460	5	\$(677,231.04)
ANR FTS (Nov-Mar)	9,248	\$11.4420	5	\$529,078.08
ANR FTS (Nov-Mar)	(15,310)	\$2.0400	5	\$(156,162.00)
ANR FTS (Nov-Mar)	15,310	\$1.7820	5	\$136,412.10
ANR FSS (Jan-Dec)	34	\$1.7820	12	\$727.06
ANR FTS (Jan-Dec)	4,829	\$0.0900	12	\$5,215.32
ANR FTS (Jan-Dec)	4,829	\$0.1500	12	\$8,692.20
ANR FTS (Nov-Mar)	15,171	\$0.0900	5	\$6,826.95
ANR FTS (Nov-Mar)	15,171	\$0.1500	5	\$11,378.25
ANR FTS (Apr-Oct)	4,935	\$0.0900	7	\$3,109.05
ANR FTS (Apr-Oct)	4,935	\$0.1500	7	\$5,181.75
Total for Change in Pipeline Entitlement				\$217,574.72

As indicated in the table above, Xcel proposed a number of changes in its demand entitlements that would increase costs from all source systems by approximately \$217,574.72. This amount is for Minnesota and North Dakota customers. As discussed

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Transmission was unable to provide 10,646 decatherms (DTH) per day of firm, winter-only capacity. Xcel reduced its reserve margin to compensate at that time to 5.7 percent.

further below, the increases are related to various reliability needs across the Xcel service territory.

The Company proposed to increase its net supply entitlements from Northern Natural Gas (NNG or Northern) and Viking Gas Transmission Company (VGT) while renewing entitlements from Great Lakes Transmission Company (GLGT), ANR Pipeline, and storage entitlements from ANR Storage Company. The net change is an increase of 10,132 Dth/day in total, but only 5,234 Dth/day for Xcel's Minnesota jurisdiction. Xcel noted that there is a small increase in the reserve margin – from 5.7 percent to 6.2 percent – due to an increase in entitlements in order to meet increased design-day consumption in the most economical manner and to raise the reserve margin back to previously targeted levels.

Xcel also continued treating storage-capacity demand charges as commodity costs instead of demand costs in the Company's July 2014 PGA as ordered in Xcel's grouped 2007-2013 Contract Demand Entitlement Filings.<sup>3</sup> Xcel also provided a summary of hedging transactions in place for the 2014-2015 heating season in response reporting requirements established in the Commission's May 27, 2008 *Order* in Docket No. G002/M-08-46.

## II. DEPARTMENT'S ANALYSIS OF XCEL'S REQUEST

The Department's analysis of the Company's request includes a description and an evaluation of the Company's *Petition*. The Department discusses each part of the Company's request below.

### A. XCEL'S PROPOSED DESIGN-DAY LEVELS

#### 1. Xcel's Customer Base

Xcel expects an increase of 4,163 customers between the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 heating seasons in the Minnesota jurisdiction (from 446,281 to 450,444). The Company projected that this increase in customer base would increase the Design Day (DD) requirements for Minnesota by 1,533 Dth.

#### 2. Xcel's Forecast

Consistent with its approach since its 2004-2005 demand-entitlement filing, the Company used two forecast methodologies in its estimate of its design-day requirement forecast for the 2015-2016 heating season: the Actual Peak Use per Customer Design Day (UPC DD) and the Average Monthly Design Day (Avg. Monthly DD). The Department assesses the foundations of the methodologies below.

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<sup>3</sup> Docket Nos. G002/M-07-1395, G002/M-08-1315, G002/M-09-1287, G002/M-10-1163, G002/M-11-1076, G002/M-12-862, and G002/M-13-663, Order dated June 9, 2014.

a. *Actual Peak Use per Customer Design Day (UPC DD)*

The UPC DD method employs a use-per-customer number of 1.57393 Dth/day to estimate the design-day demand forecast, based on the actual use per customer on Thursday, January 29, 2004, the coldest day in recent years.<sup>4</sup> Xcel multiplied the 1.57393 Dth/day value by estimates of total firm customers in all of Xcel's service areas and added the contracted billing demand for Small and Large Demand Billed Customers to arrive at the total expected design-day demand for the Xcel system. Thus, the way customers are distributed among service areas does not affect the aggregate forecasts produced by the UPC DD method because the total number of customers and the resulting total volume is unchanged no matter where the customers are assigned.

If either cold temperatures or differences in results compared with the Avg. Monthly DD method indicate that the 1.57393 Dth/day peak-day use-per-customer volume is out of date, the Company stated that it will adjust the volume accordingly.

b. *Average Monthly Design Day*

The Avg. Monthly DD method is a statistical method that uses linear regression analysis to estimate design-day demand. Xcel performs a separate regression on each demand area for both residential and commercial customers.<sup>5</sup> These separate demand areas have their own specific usage characteristics based on the input data; as such, the coefficients used to estimate use per customer vary from service area to service area. Consequently, the shifting of customers among demand areas can affect the aggregate forecasts produced by the Avg. Monthly DD method. The Company's service areas were unchanged from the 2014-2015 heating season to the 2015-2016 heating season; therefore, any changes in the aggregate forecast numbers using the Avg. Monthly DD method are related to typical growth dynamics and data turnover (Xcel uses the 60 most recent months of data in its analysis), and to the usage characteristics of customers in a given demand area.

The Company summarizes its output statistics for each of its demand areas in Attachment 1, Schedule 1, of its *Petition*. The R-squared values for its various statistical models are generally greater than 0.90, which suggests that a high level of the predictive quality of the model is included in the input data for the specified variables. There are seven models that have R-squared values less than 0.90. These lower predictive models are generally associated with models that have a smaller number of customers. This result is not surprising, or even of concern, because a smaller number of customers will inherently increase data variability because changes in consumption by a single customer, or group of customers will have a much greater impact on total consumption than an estimation group that has a larger number of customers.

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<sup>4</sup>The Department notes that, while January 2014 was the coldest month in recent years, for design day purposes only the coldest single day is important. None of the days during January 2014 had temperatures as low as the January 29, 2004 low temperature.

<sup>5</sup> Xcel has 15 separate demand areas. The demand areas that the Company conducts separate analyses on are as follows: Metro, Brainerd, Mainline, Mainline—Welcome, Willmar, Paynesville, VGT-Chisago, Watkins, Tomah, Red Wing, Grand Forks MN, Fargo MN, Grand Forks ND, Fargo ND, and WBI ND.

The statistics presented by the Company in its *Petition* suggests that the Avg. Monthly DD method produces acceptable forecasts. In Docket No. G002/M-13-663 the Department noted that, while acceptable, the Avg. Monthly DD method might not represent the best option available for forecasting natural gas needs. The Department noted that there were potential issues related to the model because it assumes natural gas consumption is constant at all temperatures; the Avg. Monthly DD estimates the average demand area consumption based on a given temperature, instead of for a peak day where consumption is likely to be above average. After conversations with the Company it was concluded that utilizing a regression model based on daily consumption data would be very difficult due the fact that it would require estimation of daily interruptible load. Further Xcel's dual method approach counteracts some of the issues inherent in the Avg. Monthly DD method as it generally results in higher forecasted requirements than those produced using the UPC DD method. Thus the Department believes that Xcel's forecast methodology is reasonable and the Department agrees with Xcel that the Company should continue to use the two methods to develop its design-day estimate, updating the UPC DD method when appropriate.

### 3. *Xcel's Forecasts*

Xcel projected that its (Minnesota and North Dakota) design-day requirements will increase by 5,781 Dth/day to 815,451 Dth/day in the 2015-2016 heating season, or a 0.71 percent increase. The Company's forecast of its Minnesota design-day requirements is 717,478 Dth/day, an increase of 1,533 Dth/day, or an increase of 0.21 percent. In addition, the forecasted North Dakota usage for 2015-2016 is 97,973 Dth/day, an increase of 4,247 Dth/day, or a 4.53% increase from the 2014-2015 heating season.

Xcel's customer forecast shows the number of Minnesota customers increasing by 4,163 from 446,281 in the 2014-2015 forecast to 450,444 in the 2015-2016 forecast, an increase of approximately 0.93 percent. The North Dakota customer count is forecasted to increase by approximately 2.73 percent to 53,490 in 2015-2016, up from 52,067 in 2014-2015.

The Department notes that the smaller rate of increase in forecasted Minnesota gas consumption indicates that the proportion of design-day responsibility on the Xcel system continues to shift from Minnesota to North Dakota. According to the *Petition*, the consumption allocator for Minnesota for the 2015-2016 heating season is 87.99 percent, down from 88.42 percent during the 2014-2015 heating season. The higher overall economic growth rates in North Dakota, relative to Minnesota, has been on-going and has led to incremental decreases in the allocator factor over the past few years. These small changes in apportionment year to year have not been significant.

The Department concludes from the Company's descriptions of its forecasting techniques that Xcel's forecasting of design-day levels were performed appropriately.

### *B. PROPOSED CHANGED IN XCEL ENERGY'S DESIGN-DAY RESOURCES*

Xcel's filing proposed changes in the resources used to meet its design-day customer requirements. Overall, the Company's system firm supply entitlements, which include

entitlements for Minnesota and North Dakota, rose slightly, from 856,048 Dth/day to 866,180 Dth/day, or 1.18 percent.

1. *Northern Natural Gas*

The majority of Xcel's firm pipeline transportation contracts are with Northern. Most of these contracts were put in place in 2007 and run through October 2017. The Company made four changes to its Northern entitlements for its 2015-2016 heating season that serve peak demand. According to the Company, the first change relates to the addition of 1,105 Dth/day of incremental capacity at St. Cloud, MN. Xcel indicated that the second change to its Northern entitlements relates to the addition of 1,208 Dth/day of incremental capacity for Hugo Area in Minnesota. The third change relates to an increase in capacity of 3,333 Dth/day at Lake Elmo, MN. Xcel stated that all of this capacity was added to meet growing demands for firm customers and would become effective November 1, 2015.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Xcel stated that it did not renew a contract for 5,629 Dth/day of capacity with Northern as the Company stated it plans to replace it with a lower cost option on VGT.

2. *Viking Gas Transmission*

The Company also made one adjustment to demand entitlements to serve peak demand on its VGT pipeline. Xcel stated that the Company plans to purchase 12,428 Dth/day of capacity for this winter as is consistent with its practices over the last several years. This capacity is available to serve the Grand Forks/East Grand Forks area, and the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area throughout the winter.<sup>7</sup>

3. *Great Lakes Gas Transmission*

Xcel renewed two Great Lakes firm capacity entitlements totaling 9,248 Dth/day of winter only capacity for two years. The Company also renewed 895 Dth/day of summer capacity to support the withdrawal and summer injection of ANR storage quantities.<sup>8</sup>

The Department has analyzed the above changes in design-day entitlement resources and each change appears reasonable to serve firm customers on a peak day. The Department, therefore, concludes that Xcel's proposed changes for 2015-2016 demand entitlements are reasonable.

C. *CHANGE IN XCEL'S RESERVE MARGIN*

Xcel's proposed design-day reserve margin in Minnesota is 6.2 percent for 2015-2016, which is a slight increase from the 5.7 percent figure in 2014-2015.<sup>9</sup> The Company initially set a reserve margin for the 2014-2015 heating season at 6.3% in Docket No. G002/M-14-654, however, in Xcel's October 31, 2014 Supplemental Comments the Company stated that Viking Gas Transmission was unable to provide 10,646 Dth per day of firm, winter-only

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<sup>6</sup> *Petition Attachment 1, pages 4.*

<sup>7</sup> *Petition Attachment 1, pages 4-5.*

<sup>8</sup> *Petition Attachment 1, pages 5.*

<sup>9</sup> See DOC Attachment 1.

capacity. Xcel reduced its reserve margin to compensate at that time to 5.7 percent. Xcel stated that it bases its reserve margin on the firm resources necessary to meet projected firm customer demand plus the capability of either the largest pump at its Wescott facility used to vaporize liquefied natural gas (LNG) or either of its St. Paul Metro propane-air peak-shaving plants. The capacity decision reflects Xcel's assessment of the most economical method of adding capacity to meet demand beyond the forecasted design-day demand. The reserve margin balances protecting against the loss of a firm gas-supply source and actual consumer demand under design-day conditions, with the likelihood of experiencing design-day conditions. Xcel stated that its proposed reserve margin of 50,728 Dth/day, of which 44,674 Dth/day is for the Minnesota jurisdiction, is appropriate to meet its design-day needs. The Company further stated that the most economical method of adding capacity often involves adding increments that do not precisely match expected changes in demand. Xcel's proposed reserve margin is within the 5-7 percent range that serves as a rule of thumb in deciding whether a given margin is reasonable. The Department, therefore, concludes that the 2015-2016 reserve margin is reasonable.

#### *D. CHANGES IN XCEL'S JURISDICTIONAL ALLOCATIONS*

The previously noted faster economic growth in North Dakota versus Minnesota is reflected in the revised Minnesota jurisdictional allocation factor which is used to allocate new peak capacity to Minnesota and North Dakota. The allocation factor is calculated by dividing the design day forecasted demand for Minnesota (717,478 Dth/day) by the same demand for the Company's system (815,452 Dth/day). The Avg. Monthly DD results are used to update the allocation factor, which fell from 88.42 percent to 87.99 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Small annual changes in the allocation factor are almost inevitable. A locational change of a handful of customers in one state or the other can change the total numbers upon which the allocation factor is based and therefore change the allocation between the states. Again, such changes are typically not significant. In addition, the Department is aware that the increased economic activity in North Dakota is increasing use of natural gas. Therefore, the Department concludes that Xcel's proposed jurisdictional allocation change is reasonable.

#### *E. CHANGES IN XCEL'S SUPPLIER RESERVATION FEES*

Xcel stated that its Supplier Reservation fees have changed. The resulting net change is an increase of \$136,762 annually. **[TRADE SECRET DATA HAS BEEN EXCISED]**. The new total expense level reflects these changes. Therefore, the Department concludes that Xcel's proposal is reasonable.<sup>11</sup>

#### *F. XCEL'S PGA COST RECOVERY PROPOSAL*

Xcel proposed to reflect the costs associated with the demand entitlements in the *Petition* in the PGA effective November 1, 2015. The demand entitlements in Xcel Trade Secret Attachment 2, Schedule 1, Page 1 of 2, represent the demand entitlements for which the Company's firm customers will pay. Department Attachment 2 compares the July 2015 PGA

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<sup>10</sup> *Petition* Attachment 1, page 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*



costs to the anticipated November 2015 PGA costs for several customer classes. The resulting per Dth cost changes related strictly to changes in demand costs have the following annual rate effects.

- Annual demand costs decrease by \$0.0162/Dth, or approximately \$01.41 less annually, for the average Residential customer consuming 87 Dth annually;
- Annual demand costs decrease of \$0.0163/Dth, or approximately \$4.63 less annually, for the average Small Commercial customer consuming 284 Dth annually;
- Annual demand costs decrease of \$0.0160/Dth, or approximately \$23.40 less annually, for the average Large Commercial customer consuming 1463 Dth annually; and
- No Change in annual demand costs for the average Small Interruptible, Medium Interruptible, and Large Interruptible customers. These customer classes are not allocated demand costs under the current cost allocation plan.

Based on its review, the Department concludes that the Company's proposal appears to be reasonable. The Department is aware that minor changes in cost and entitlement levels may occur between the filing of these *Comments* and November 1, 2015. As such, the Department recommends that the Company provide a supplemental filing on November 1, 2015 detailing final demand entitlement levels and costs.

### III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Department recommends that the Commission:

- approve Xcel's proposed level of demand entitlement, subject to possible adjustment in the Company's November 1, 2015 supplemental filing;
- allow Xcel to recover associated demand costs, subject to possible adjustment in the Company's November 1, 2015 supplemental filing, through the monthly Purchased Gas Adjustment effective November 1, 2015; and
- approve changes in the jurisdictional allocation for demand costs.

The Department also recommends that the Company provide, in its November 1, 2015 supplemental filing, an update on any hedging transactions that are entered into for the 2015-2016 heating season.

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## **CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I, Sharon Ferguson, hereby certify that I have this day, served copies of the following document on the attached list of persons by electronic filing, certified mail, e-mail, or by depositing a true and correct copy thereof properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States Mail at St. Paul, Minnesota.

**Minnesota Department of Commerce  
Public Comments**

**Docket No. G002/M-15-727**

**Dated this 11<sup>th</sup> day of September 2015**

**/s/Sharon Ferguson**

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