

May 19, 2017

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

RE: Supplemental Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources Docket No. E002/M-16-777

Dear Mr. Wolf:

Attached are the supplemental comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources (Department) in the following matter:

Petition of Xcel Energy for Approval of the Acquisition of Wind Generation from the Company's 2016-2030 Integrated Resource Plan.

The request for proposals (RFP) was filed on September 22, 2016, the petition for utilityowned generation was filed on October 24, 2016 and the selection of projects from the RFP was filed on March 15, 2017 by:

Aakash Chandarana Regional Vice President Northern States Power Company 414 Nicollet Mall Minneapolis, MN 55401

The Department provides its supplemental comments to respond to issues raised by other parties in reply comments. The Department continues to recommend that the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) **approve the petition with modifications.** The Department's team of Sue Peirce, Mark Johnson and myself are available to answer any questions the Commission may have.

Sincerely,

/s/ STEVE RAKOW Analyst Coordinator

SR/lt Attachment MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

SUPPLEMENTAL COMMENTS OF THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

DOCKET NO. E002/M-16-777

I. INTRODUCTION

On September 22, 2016, Northern States Power Company d/b/a Xcel Energy (Xcel or the Company) filed a letter informing the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) that the Company issued a request for proposals (RFP) for wind resources that would achieve commercial operation prior to December 31, 2020 in order to qualify for 100 percent of the current production tax credit (PTC). RFP bids were to be submitted to Xcel by October 25, 2016.

On October 24, 2016, Xcel filed the Company's *Petition for Approval of the Acquisition of Wind Generation from the Company's 2016-2030 Integrated Resource Plan* (Petition). The Petition requested approval for the Company to build, own, and operate a 750 MW portfolio consisting of four separate self-build wind projects. The Petition also indicated that Xcel would supplement the Petition in the first quarter of 2017, after the Company evaluated bids received in response to the pending RFP.

On November 4, 2016, the Commission issued a notice indicating that no comment period was being established on the Petition.

On November 17, 2016, the Company provided a corrected Attachment C to the Petition.

On January 4, 2017, Xcel filed a progress report regarding the RFP.

On March 14, 2017, Xcel filed the Company's *Application for Consideration of a Resource Treatment Framework to Address Jurisdictional Cost Allocation Issues*, a petition originally filed December 31, 2016 in Docket No. E002/M-16-223.

On March 15, 2017, Xcel filed the Company's Supplement: Wind Generation Acquisition (Supplement).

On March 20, 2017, the Commission issued its *Notice of Comment Period on Petition* on various issues concerning Xcel's total proposed portfolio of 1,550 MW of wind, providing the due dates of May 1, 2017 for comments and May 15, 2017 for reply comments.

On April 3, 2017, Xcel filed a letter (April 3 Letter) regarding the application of Minnesota Statutes § 216B.50 and Minnesota Rule 7825.1800 to the Petition and the Supplement.

On April 7, 2017, the Commission issued a *Revised Notice of Comment Period on Petition* (Notice), maintaining the due dates for comments but expanding the topics open for comment.

On May 1, 2017, comments were filed by the following parties:

- Clean Energy Organizations;¹
- Department;
- Geronimo Energy;
- Laborers District Council of Minnesota and North Dakota;
- Minnesota Chamber of Commerce (Chamber); and
- Office of Attorney General-Residential Utilities and Antitrust Division (OAG).

On May 15, 2017, reply comments were filed by the following parties:

- Department;
- OAG; and
- Xcel.

Below are the Department's supplemental comments. The Department indicated in the May 15 comments that we would supplement our response with the completed analysis of Xcel's proposal to use the requested resources to comply with the Minnesota Renewable Energy Standard (RES). In addition, we address the application of Minnesota Statute §216B.50 and curtailment matters.

II. REPLY TO XCEL

A. RENEWABLE ENERGY STANDARDS ANALYSIS

Xcel requested that the Commission "confirm that the 1,550 MW proposed wind portfolio is a reasonable and prudent way to continue to meet the obligations under Minnesota's Renewable Energy Standard (RES)" under Minnesota Statutes §216B.1691. The Department's May 1, 2017 comments stated "at this time the Department has requested further information regarding the Company's response to Commission Information Request No. 6 and will provide a complete RES analysis in reply comments."

The Department reviewed the information provided by Xcel in response to DOC IR Nos. 16 and 17, and concludes overall that their analysis is reasonable. The Company appropriately allocated its renewable energy credits (RECs) among its various jurisdictions. The forecast

¹ The Clean Energy Organizations are Fresh Energy, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, Sierra Club, and Wind on the Wires.

of energy requirements initially used by the Department to assess whether the projects were needed for Xcel to comply with the RES was higher than that used by the Company. However, the Department's forecast appears to have included line losses, which overstated the amount of renewable power that would be needed for the RES. Thus, the Department concludes that Xcel's forecast of renewable energy that would actually need to be produced for Xcel's system is reasonable.

Xcel undertook an analysis assuming the 24 percent wind requirement starting in 2020, as well as an overall RES compliance calculation without the 24 percent wind requirement. Without the proposed projects, Xcel has sufficient wind resources to comply with the 24 percent wind requirement through 2026, and without the 24 percent wind requirement to meet the RES through 2027. With the proposed projects, Xcel would have enough renewable power to comply with the RES through 2044.

The Department concludes that Xcel will need the additional wind resources provided by the RFP by the mid-2020's.

Technically, Xcel would exceed, in some years, the amount of renewable energy needed to comply with the RES. However, because the wind projects are highly cost effective, and it is unknown whether that will be the case in the future, the Department concludes that Xcel's proposal to use the projects to comply with the RES is reasonable.

B. APPLICATION OF MINNESOTA STATUTES §216B.50

The Department's May 1, 2017 comments recommended that "in reply comments, Xcel discuss the need for a variance regarding reporting the information outlined under Minnesota Rules 7825.1400 (A) to (J) or provide the required information."² In response, the Company requested a variance in this case pursuant to Minn. R. 7829.3200 from providing the information required by Minnesota Rules 7825.1400 (A) to (J) for the Blazing Star I, Blazing Star I, Foxtail, Freeborn, and Crowned Ridge projects (in addition to the Lake Benton Project). Xcel stated that the Company does not intend to issue, sell, or transfer any stock in connection with these projects; thus these components of the rules regarding capital structure are not relevant to this docket. Moreover, Xcel stated that requiring this information would impose an excessive burden and that granting the variance would be in the public interest since the proposed projects are in the public interest. The Department agrees with Xcel's requested variance and recommends that the Commission approve Xcel's requested variance from providing the information required by Minnesota Rules 7825.1400 (A) to (J).

C. CURTAILMENT COMPENSATION

The Department's May 1, 2017 comments recommended that Xcel clarify "the difference in the following provisions in the contracts regarding (non-) compensation for curtailments:

² This information is identified as necessary under Minnesota Rule 7825.1800, Filing Requirements for Petitions to Acquire Property, subdivision B. Xcel did provide the purchase prices, terms of payment and other considerations required under this subdivision.

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- combination of Provisions 8.3 A and 8.3 B.1(a) and
- Provision 8.3 B.2."

The Company clarified the three Provisions as follows. First, "section 8.3(A) of the PPAs gives the Company, or Transmission Authority, the right to curtail the delivery of renewable energy from the facility for any reason and in their sole discretion regardless of whether or not such a curtailment would be considered compensable or non-compensable."

Second, "The intent of the language in section 8.3(B)(1)(a) is to specify that if the Company or Transmission Authority curtails deliveries of renewable energy for any reason that would not constitute a Non-Compensable Curtailment, as defined in Section 8.3(B)(2) of the PPAs, such a curtailment would be compensable."

Third, Xcel clarified that:

Section 8.3(B)(2) of the PPAs further provides that any curtailment of deliveries of renewable energy, other than a compensable curtailment by the Company, would be considered non-compensable. This section of the PPAs also includes a non-exhaustive list of examples of Non-Compensable Curtailment.

Finally, the Department requested information regarding whether curtailments due to insufficient transmission outlet from MISO's Zone 1 would be compensable or not. Xcel's response was that "[since] outlet from MISO's Zone 1 is beyond the point of delivery for both Clean Energy #1 and Crowned Ridge, such curtailments of renewable energy would be considered compensable unless the Transmission Authority were to declare an Emergency Condition or Force Majeure, or otherwise restrict or reduce the maximum permissible output in connection with the facility's Interconnection Agreement(s)." This response illustrates the importance of having sufficient regional transmission projects in enabling economic dispatch of resources.³

The Department considers this information to have responded to the Department's requests.

³ Since wind projects have a negative marginal cost while receiving the production tax credit, any curtailed wind energy will be replaced by higher cost resources in the dispatch order.

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III. DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

The Department recommends that the Commission:

- approve the Lake Benton, Blazing Star I, Blazing Star II, Foxtail, Freeborn, and Crowned Ridge projects under § 216B.50;
- approve a variance from Minnesota Rules 7825.1800 (B)—the need to provide information required by Minnesota Rules 7825.1400 (A) to (J)—for the Lake Benton, Blazing Star I, Blazing Star II, Foxtail, Freeborn, and Crowned Ridge projects;
- order Xcel to provide projects of less than 12 MW, the threshold at which the Company's competitive bidding process applies, a reasonable period (perhaps 60 days) to provide proposals for re-powering existing facilities;⁴
- put Xcel on notice that:
 - the Commission will hold Xcel accountable for the prices and terms used to evaluate each of the selected projects for the purpose of cost recovery from Xcel ratepayers;
 - ratepayers will not be put at risk for any costs that are higher than bid or for assumed benefits that do not materialize;
 - ratepayers must be sufficiently protected from risks associated with the non-deliverability of accredited capacity and/or energy from the projects;
- order Xcel to report in its monthly fuel clause filings and annual automatic adjustment (AAA) filings the amount of any curtailment payments, along with explanations for the curtailments;
- require Xcel to account, clearly and separately, for all costs, including costs related to capital, operation and maintenance expense, and any other costs related to these facilities; and
- approve Xcel's proposed 1,550 MW of wind resource additions.

In addition to the Company's proposed January 2018 compliance filing, the Department recommends that the Commission require the Company to report, until the projects are inservice, project failures along with the options available to the Commission to remedy the failure.

Finally, the Department recommends that the Commission confirm that Xcel's proposed portfolio is a reasonable way to meet the Company's obligations under Minnesota's renewable energy standards.

⁴ In addition to the criteria applied in this proceeding Xcel should be required to use two additional criteria:

[•] That the repowered project has a lower overall LCOE than the existing PPA—supplemented by a generic replacement if necessary; and

[•] That the repowered project has an LCOE that is equal to or less than the highest LCOE approved by the Commission in this proceeding [Docket No. E002/M-16-777].

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Linda Chavez, hereby certify that I have this day served copies of the following document on the attached list of persons by electronic filing, 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 – SUPPLEMENTAL COMMENTS

Docket Nos. E002/M-16-777

Dated this 19th day of May, 2017.

/s/Linda Chavez

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