215 South Cascade Street
PO Box 496
Fergus Falls, Minnesota 56538-0496
218 739-8200
www.otpco.com (web site)

June 6, 2016



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

Re: In the Matter of a Commission Inquiry into Fees Charged on Qualifying Facilities Docket No. E999/CI-15-755
REPLY COMMENTS

Dear Mr. Wolf:

Enclosed for filing in the above-referenced matter are Otter Tail Power Company's (Otter Tail) Reply Comments.

Otter Tail has electronically filed this document with the Commission which, in compliance with Minn. Rule 7829.1300, subp. 2, also constitutes service on the Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources and the Office of Attorney General-Antitrust & Utilities Division. A Certificate of Service is also enclosed.

If you have any questions regarding this filing, please contact me at 218-739-8956 or at cstephenson@otpco.com.

Sincerely,

/S/ CARY STEPHENSON Cary Stephenson Associate General Counsel

nlo
Enclosures
By electronic filing
c: Service List



STATE OF MINNESOTA BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of a Commission Inquiry into Fees Charged on Qualifying Facilities Docket No. E999/CI-15-755

OTTER TAIL POWER COMPANY'S REPLY COMMENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Otter Tail Power Company ("Otter Tail" or the "Company") files the following Reply Comments in the above-referenced matter.

II. OVERVIEW

Otter Tail appreciates the opportunity to respond to the many comments filed by various interests in this docket. The comments are voluminous but contain common threads and arguments. In an effort to be concise, Otter Tail's response makes the following core points:

- 1. Otter Tail's customer charges are authorized by statute, rule and commission order.
- 2. Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 permits recovery of interconnection costs and other fixed charges normally assessed to non-generating customers through monthly customer charges;
- 3. Otter Tail's customer charges are reasonable and non-discriminatory; and
- 4. Changes in Commission policy and practice concerning the promotion of distributed generation under Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 should be applied prospectively and not retroactively.

III. OTTER TAIL'S REPLY COMMENTS

A. Otter Tail's Customer Charges are Authorized by Statute, Rule and Commission Order.

Many commenters maintain that customer charges specific to qualifying facilities are barred by Minn. Stat. § 216B.164. A common argument appears to rely on truncated portions of the statute. These arguments are without substance. A full reading of 216B.164, its implementing rules, and Commissions orders makes clear that customer charges for the incremental expense of metering equipment and associated administration and maintenance expenses are authorized by law. Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 subd.8(b) provides as follows:

(b) Nothing contained in this section shall be construed to excuse the qualifying facility from any obligation for costs of interconnection and wheeling in excess of those normally incurred by the utility for customers with similar load characteristics who are not cogenerators or small power producers, or from any fixed charges normally assessed such nongenerating customers.

Reasonable metering cost, including the cost of equipment, administration and maintenance are interconnection costs under Minn. Rule 7835.0100:

"Interconnection costs" means the reasonable costs of connection, switching, metering, transmission, distribution, safety provisions, and administrative costs incurred by the utility that are directly related to installing and maintaining the physical facilities necessary to permit interconnected operations with a qualifying facility.

Interconnection costs apply to qualifying facilities regardless of the size of the qualifying facility.

Otter Tail's small power producer customer charges reflect (1) the cost of non-standard equipment, (2) directly related annual per meter O&M expenses; and (3) directly related annual per meter administrative costs (customer accounts, services, and informational expense). These metering, maintenance and administrative costs are interconnection costs authorized by Stat. § 216B.164 and its implementing regulations.

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¹ See *Otter Tail Response to Information Request MN-PUC 003*. For solar net energy billing customers OTP uses a bi-directional KWh meter at the point of service and a KWh meter to measure output of the solar generator. For other installations OTP utilizes a bidirectional KWh at the point of service or as required to property measure energy flows. See *Otter Tail Response to Information Request MN-PUC 001*.

Moreover Otter Tail's current rates, including its customer charges have been approved by the Commission in a general rate case.² That the Commission has approved these charges in a rate case should preclude retroactive arguments as to whether the charges are authorized by law.

Even if the Commission determined that portions of Otter Tail's small power producer customer charges fell outside the definition of interconnection costs the charges would still be authorized by Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 subd. 8(b), which explicitly states that qualifying facilities are not excused from any fixed charges normally assessed non-generating customers.

Otter Tail normally assesses customer charges to non-generating customers requiring specialized equipment in order to recover a portion of the equipment expense and directly related O & M and administrative expenses. For example, Otter Tail assesses customers electing to have a controlled water heater a monthly \$2.00 customer charge under the Company's Water Heating Control Rider.³ The customer charge recovers a portion of the expense of the additional, non-standard equipment and O & M and administrative expenses directly associated with the provision of this specialized rate. The customer charge is based on traditional cost-causation principles. Otter Tail emphasized this point in its Comments. Disallowing similar charges for distributed generation customers would in fact excuse those customers from charges normally assessed non-generating customers, creating a favored category of customer inconsistent with Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 subd. 8(b).

The 2015 amendment to Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 subdivision 3 applicable to cooperative and municipal utilities does not alter the obligation of qualifying facilities to pay reasonable interconnection charges and other fixed charges normally assessed non-generating customers. The 2015 amendment states in part that "[a] cooperative electric association or municipal utility may charge an additional fee to recover the fixed costs not already paid for by the customer through the customer's existing billing arrangement. Any additional charge by the utility must be reasonable and appropriate for that class of customer based on the most recent cost of service study."

² Docket No. E017/GR-10-239.

³ Section 14.01 of Otter Tail's tariff.

Some comments suggest that the 2015 amendment authorizes customer charges for incremental costs of metering and associated maintenance and administrative expenses, which in turn means that public utilities' recovery of these expenses has not been previously authorized. This ignores subdivision 8(b) of Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 and the Commission's Order Adopting Rules, Docket No. E-999/R-80-560 that discusses metering and related charges as the responsibility of qualifying facilities. By implication the 2015 amendment must authorize recovery of fixed costs and expense not previously authorized by Minn. Stat. § 216B.164, such as fixed cost that are part of the energy charge of a cooperative electric association or municipal utility.⁴

B. Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 Permits Monthly Customer Charges.

A number of commentators argue that that reoccurring monthly charges are unlawful, or if lawful, must be assessed as a one time, upfront charge at the time of interconnection. The Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources ("DOC") appears to object to monthly charges, stating that "recovery of a one-time cost on a monthly basis in perpetuity is not reasonable" in apparent reference to the cost of equipment.⁵ Otter Tail respectfully disagrees.

Arguments that monthly charges are unlawful or inconsistent with the state-approved standard contract incorrectly assume that interconnection costs are one-time expense strictly limited to the cost of equipment. Interconnection costs include administrative and maintenance expenses which are inherently on-going expenses directly related to and caused by the interconnection with the qualifying facility. The same holds true if these expenses are considered fixed fees normally assessed non-generating customers.

Arguments against monthly charges also fail to recognize the impracticability and expense of trying to recover all authorized costs as a onetime charge at the time of interconnection. A one-time, upfront charge would necessarily require customer-specific calculations and higher

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⁴ Otter Tail understands that this issue is the subject of another docket. The existence of one or more other dockets construing Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 is another reason for caution in this docket.

⁵ Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce, Division of Energy Resources, May 6, 2016, p 5.

administrative costs, all of which would be resisted by distributed generation customers. While some customer-specific calculations are warranted⁶, it would be very difficult to determine a reasonable one time, upfront charge for all authorized expenses. Another concern is that one time, upfront charges do not allow adjustments when technology or expenses change. The lack of the ability to adjust customer charges for interconnection costs could result in significant disparities among distributed generation customers depending on when they entered into the state-approved contract. Another consideration is that a one time, upfront charge for all expenses forces the customer to assume the risk that the customer's generation system will be in operation for a period of time corresponding to the charge. Some customers could cease generation earlier than anticipated forfeiting the value of the upfront payment.⁷ Likewise a one-time, upfront charge for metering equipment and on-going expenses directly associated with the administration and maintenance of that equipment could pose a significant upfront cost to qualifying facilities, creating a barrier for the development of distributed generation.

Nothing in Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 precludes monthly charges, or mandates one time, upfront charges. The Commission has also recognized that interconnection costs could be recovered through different mechanisms including on-going monthly charges. In its 1983 Order Adopting Rules for Minn. Stat. § 216B.164, the Commission discussed the reasonableness of a hypothetically billing arrangement incorporating a "monthly carrying cost" for an additional meter. Consistent with this, the long standing practice among Minnesota utilities has been to recover metering costs through monthly charges filed and approved by the Commission miscellaneous docket and other filings.

Otter Tail has maintained a monthly customer charge in its small power producer tariffs since 1983, with its current customer charges incorporated into small power producer riders approved in Otter Tail's last general rate case. To conclude that monthly customer charges for authorized interconnection costs is inappropriate cuts against decades of established practice and reasonable expectations. Among other things, such a determination could have significant unanticipated

⁶ For example, the expense of line extensions is appropriately a one time, customer specific expense.

⁷ It would be burdensome and expense for utilities to have to implement a refund process for such customers.

⁸ Order Adopting Rules, Docket E-999/R-80-560, March 7, 1983, p. 62-63.

and undesirable effect. Otter Tail believes this risk warrants a cautious, prospective approach to change to the extent change is deemed appropriate.

C. Otter Tail's Customer Charges Are Reasonable and Non-Discriminatory.

Many comments contend that even if utilities are authorized to recover monthly interconnection charges or fixed charges normally assessed non-generating customers the utilities have failed to demonstrate the reasonableness of their charges, and/or the utilities' charges are discriminatory. Otter Tail disagrees.

Otter Tail has <u>already</u> met any burden it may have to demonstrate the reasonableness and the non-discriminatory nature of it rates, including customer charges for small power producers when Otter Tail's rates were approved in the Company's last general rate case. Therefore any argument that Otter Tail should reimburse customers these charges asks the Commission to engage in retroactive ratemaking and should be rejected. Likewise arguments that utilities should suspend customer charges approved by the Commission prospectively are not supported by the record and in Otter Tail's view outside the scope of this docket.

Regardless of the Commission's previous approval or Otter Tail's rates, there is ample evidence that Otter Tail's customer charges are reasonable and non-discriminatory. For context, Otter Tail has maintained customer charges in its small power producer tariffs since 1983. As shown in Table 1, Comparison of Customer Charges: Net Energy Billing vs. Residential Service, Otter Tail's net energy billing rate is illustrative as reasonable and non-discriminatory:

Table 1, Comparison of Customer Charges: Net Energy Billing vs. Residential Service

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Year	Net Energy Billing Rate - Monthly Customer Charge	Applicable Commission Dockets for Small Power Producer - Customer Charges	Residential Service - Monthly Customer Charge -Zone 1	Applicable Commission Dockets for Residential Service - Customer Charges
198	3 \$ 1.40	E120/M83-388	\$ 5.95	
198	4 \$ 1.40	E017/CG84-384	\$ 5.95	
198	5 \$ 1.40		\$ 5.95	
198	66 \$ 1.40		\$ 5.95	
198	7 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
198	8 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
198	9 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
199	0 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
199	1 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
19	2 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
199	3 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
19:	4 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
19	5 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
19	6 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
19:	7 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
19	8 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
19	9 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
20	0 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
20	1 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
200	2 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
20	3 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
20	4 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
200	5 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
200	6 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.15	
20	7 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.48 - Interim Rate	E-017/GR-07-1178
20	8 \$ 1.40		\$ 6.48 - Interim Rate	
20	9 \$ 1.40		\$ 8.00	E-017/GR-07-1178
20	0 \$ 1.45 - Interim Rate	E-017/GR-10-239	\$ 8.30	E-017/GR-10-239
20	1 \$ 1.45 - Interim Rate		\$ 8.30	
20	1 \$ 3.70		\$ 8.50	
20	2 \$ 3.70		\$ 8.50	
20	3 \$ 3.70		\$ 8.50	
20	4 \$ 3.70		\$ 8.50	
	5 \$ 3.70		\$ 8.50	
	6 \$ 3.70		\$ 8.50	
	6 \$ 4.05 –Interim Rate	E-017/GR-15-1033	\$9.31 - Interim Rate	E-017/GR-15-1033
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As Table 1 indicates Otter Tail's customer charges remained unchanged for 26 years and have increased very little overtime. In Docket No. E017/GR-10-239 Otter Tail rates including its customer charges were supported by cost of service and marginal cost studies and testimony⁹. At no time were these charges challenged or questioned as unreasonable or unlawful.

In this docket Otter Tail has provided a comparison of expenses for customers with and without distributed generation. The comparison showed the significant differences in expenses between distributed generation ("DG") and non-DG customers, including the following data:

- Meter Cost (single phase)
 - o Meter Required for DG Customer: approximately \$161
 - o Standard Meter for non DG Customer: approximately \$20
- Annual per meter O & M expense (single phase)
 - o DG Customer: approximately \$25
 - o Non-DG Customer: approximately \$9
- Annual per meter (single phase) administrative expense for customer accounts, services and information:
 - o DG customer: approximately \$106
 - o Non-DG customer \$86.

Customer charges are adjusted for bill impacts. The unadjusted expenses, however, show the significant incremental expenses associated with DG service vs non-DG service. On their face, the expense differentials indicate it is neither unreasonable nor discriminatory to charge DG net billing customers an additional \$3.70 per month more than that charged non-DG customers. The DG customer charges reflect incremental costs on top of and not overlapping with non-DG customer charges. If the Commission requires more detailed analysis OTP will of course comply.¹¹ Otter Tail would urge that the level of analysis applied to validating the

⁹ Rate Design Testimony of David G. Prazak, pp. 63-65, Volume 2B, Direct Testimony and Supporting Schedules.

¹⁰ Otter Tail Response to Information Request MN-PUC 003. Please note that the expenses information provided in this IR response was based on current costs.

Otter Tail did not respond to discovery request propounded by Energy Freedom Coalition of America (EFCA).

Otter Tail could not identify any legal basis for EFCA, a non-party lacking statutory standing to engage in discovery

reasonableness of customer charges have some level of proportionality with the magnitude of the charges. It seems that some commenters demand a level of analysis that will cause utilities to question whether the administrative burden of determining charges is worth the small amount of expense recovered.

Some commentators such as the Sierra Club assert that the reasonableness of utilities customers charges under Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 should take into account a wide range of factors including factors at issue in the Minnesota Value of Solar docket. Otter Tail believes this argument raises significant policy questions and choices that exceed the scope and intention of this docket. Moreover a final order has not issued in Value of Solar matter, making any application of factors rooted in that docket premature.

D. Changes in Commission Policy and Practice Concerning the Promotion of Distributed Generation under Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 should be Applied Prospective and not Retroactively.

Otter Tail acknowledges that much has change concerning distributed generation and technology around qualifying facilities over the last 30 years. Otter Tail also acknowledges that the Commission has significant discretion in striking a balance under Minn. Stat. § 216B.164 between promotion of distributed generation and the protecting the interest of all rate payers.

The Commission may elect to shift its weighting of policy considerations, effectively putting its thumb more heavily on the side of scale promoting distributed generation, which may in turn result in result in a different process in assessing interconnection costs than what has previously occurred. While action of this nature is within the Commission's discretion, Otter Tail respectfully submits that such action would exceed the scope and intent of this docket. Regardless of whether within the scope of this docket or not, such policy choices of this matter should be made on a prospective basis, with clear direction to utilities, ensuring that utilities may

in a Commission-initiated investigation. Moreover review of prior Commission initiated investigation dockets indicated no prior precedent for such discovery requests. EFCA, which does not claim to represent any specific OTP customer, issued voluminous requests that in Otter Tail's judgment risked establishing a precedent unsupported by law and skewing the Commission-investigation process.

recover reasonable and prudent costs while complying with the Commission's interpretation of applicable law.

Dated: June 6, 2016 Respectfully Submitted,

OTTER TAIL POWER COMPANY

By: /s/ CARY STEPHENSON Cary Stephenson Associate General Counsel 215 S. Cascade Street Fergus Falls, MN 56537 (218) 739-8956 cstephenson@otpco.com

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

RE: In the Matter of a Commission Inquiry into Fees Charged on Qualifying Facilities Docket No. E999/CI-15-755

I, Nancy L. Olson, hereby certify that I have this day served a copy of the following, or a summary thereof, on Daniel P. Wolf and Sharon Ferguson by e-filing, and to all other persons on the attached service list by electronic service or by First Class Mail.

Otter Tail Power Company Reply Comments

Dated this 6th day of June 2016.

/s/ NANCY L. OLSON

Nancy L. Olson, Regulatory Filing Coordinator Otter Tail Power Company 215 South Cascade Street Fergus Falls MN 56537 (218) 739-8376

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Ross	Abbey	ross@mysunshare.com	SunShare, LLC	609 S. 10th Street Suite 210 Minneapolis, MN 55404	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Michael	Allen	michael.allen@allenergysol ar.com	All Energy Solar	721 W 26th st Suite 211 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55405	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Christopher	Anderson	canderson@allete.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St Duluth, MN 558022191	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Julia	Anderson	Julia.Anderson@ag.state.m n.us	Office of the Attorney General-DOC	1800 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012134	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Sara	Baldwin Auck	sarab@irecusa.org	Interstate Renewable Energy Council, Inc.	PO Box 1156 Latham, NY 12110	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Derek	Bertsch	derek.bertsch@mrenergy.c om	Missouri River Energy Services	3724 West Avera Drive PO Box 88920 Sioux Falls, SD 57109-8920	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
William A.	Blazar	bblazar@mnchamber.com	Minnesota Chamber Of Commerce	Suite 1500 400 Robert Street Nor St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service th	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kenneth	Bradley	kbradley1965@gmail.com		2837 Emerson Ave S Apt CW112 Minneapolis, MN 55408	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jon	Brekke	jbrekke@grenergy.com	Great River Energy	12300 Elm Creek Boulevard Maple Grove, MN 553694718	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kathleen M.	Brennan	kmb@mcgrannshea.com	McGrann Shea Carnival, Straughn & Lamb, Chartered	N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Christina	Brusven	cbrusven@fredlaw.com	Fredrikson Byron	200 S 6th St Ste 4000 Minneapolis, MN 554021425	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Michael J.	Bull	mbull@mncee.org	Center for Energy and Environment	212 Third Ave N Ste 560 Minneapolis, MN 55401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jessica	Burdette	jessica.burdette@state.mn. us	Department of Commerce	85 7th Place East Suite 500 St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Joel	Cannon	jcannon@tenksolar.com	Tenk Solar, Inc.	9549 Penn Avenue S Bloomington, MN 55431	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Douglas M.	Carnival	dmc@mcgrannshea.com	McGrann Shea Carnival Straughn & Lamb	N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John J.	Carroll	jcarroll@newportpartners.c om	Newport Partners, LLC	9 Cushing, Suite 200 Irvine, California 92618	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kenneth A.	Colburn	kcolburn@symbioticstrategi es.com	Symbiotic Strategies, LLC	26 Winton Road Meredith, NH 32535413	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
George	Crocker	gwillc@nawo.org	North American Water Office	PO Box 174 Lake Elmo, MN 55042	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Arthur	Crowell	Crowell.arthur@yahoo.com	A Work of Art Landscapes	234 Jackson Ave N Hopkins, MN 55343	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Leigh	Currie	Icurrie@mncenter.org	Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy	26 E. Exchange St., Suite 206 St. Paul, Minnesota 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
David	Dahlberg	davedahlberg@nweco.com	Northwestern Wisconsin Electric Company	P.O. Box 9 104 South Pine Street Grantsburg, WI 548400009	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
James	Darabi	james.darabi@solarfarm.co m	Solar Farm, LLC	2355 Fairview Ave #101 St. Paul, MN 55113	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Dustin	Denison	dustin@appliedenergyinno vations.org	Applied Energy Innovations	4000 Minnehaha Ave S Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
James	Denniston	james.r.denniston@xcelen ergy.com	Xcel Energy Services, Inc.	414 Nicollet Mall, Fifth Floor Minneapolis, MN 55401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Curt	Dieren	curt.dieren@dgr.com	L&O Power Cooperative	1302 S Union St Rock Rapids, IA 51246	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
lan	Dobson	ian.dobson@ag.state.mn.u s	Office of the Attorney General-RUD	Antitrust and Utilities Division 445 Minnesota Street, BRM Tower St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service 1400	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Mike	Eggl	meggl@bepc.com	Basin Electric Power Cooperative	1717 East Interstate Avenue Bismarck, ND 58503	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kristen	Eide Tollefson	N/A	R-CURE	28477 N Lake Ave Frontenac, MN 55026-1044	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Betsy	Engelking	betsy@geronimoenergy.co m	Geronimo Energy	7650 Edinborough Way Suite 725 Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Oncu	Er	oncu.er@avantenergy.com	Avant Energy, Agent for MMPA	220 S. Sixth St. Ste. 1300 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
John	Farrell	jfarrell@ilsr.org	Institute for Local Self-Reliance	1313 5th St SE #303 Minneapolis, MN 55414	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Emma	Fazio	emma.fazio@stoel.com	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth Street Suite 4200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Sharon	Ferguson	sharon.ferguson@state.mn .us	Department of Commerce	85 7th Place E Ste 500 Saint Paul, MN 551012198	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kevin T.	Fox	kfox@kfwlaw.com	KEYES, FOX & WIEDMAN, LLP	1580 N. Lincoln St Ste 880 Denver, CO 80203	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Nathan	Franzen	nathan@geronimoenergy.c om	Geronimo Energy	7650 Edinborough Way Suite 725 Edina, MN 55435	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Amy	Fredregill	Amy.S.Fredregill@xcelener gy.com	Xcel Energy	414 Nicollet Mall Minneapolis, MN 55401	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Hal	Galvin	halgalvin@comcast.net	Provectus Energy Development llc	1936 Kenwood Parkway Minneapolis, MN 55405	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Elaine	Garry	egarry@peoplesrec.com	Peoples Energy Cooperative	1775 Lake Shady Ave S Oronoco, MN 55960-2351	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Edward	Garvey	garveyed@aol.com	Residence	32 Lawton St Saint Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Allen	Gleckner	gleckner@fresh-energy.org	Fresh Energy	408 St. Peter Street Ste 220 Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Bryan	Gower	bgower@apx.com	APX, Inc.	N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Fimothy	Gulden	info@winonarenewableene rgy.com	Winona Renewable Energy, LLC	1449 Ridgewood Dr Winona, MN 55987	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Tony	Hainault	anthony.hainault@co.henn epin.mn.us	Hennepin County DES	701 4th Ave S Ste 700 Minneapolis, MN 55415-1842	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Duane	Hebert	duane.hebert@novelenerg y.biz	Novel Energy Solutions	1628 2nd Ave SE Rochester, MN 55904	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John	Helmers	helmers.john@co.olmsted. mn.us	Olmsted County Waste to Energy	2122 Campus Drive SE Rochester, MN 55904-4744	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jared	Hendricks	hendricksj@owatonnautiliti es.com	Owatonna Public Utilities	PO Box 800 208 S Walnut Ave Owatonna, MN 55060-2940	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Annete	Henkel	mui@mnutilityinvestors.org	Minnesota Utility Investors	413 Wacouta Street #230 St.Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Lynn	Hinkle	lhinkle@mnseia.org	Minnesota Solar Energy Industries Association	2512 33rd Ave South #2 Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jim	Horan	Jim@MREA.org	Minnesota Rural Electric Association	11640 73rd Ave N Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Ashley	Houston			120 Fairway Rd Chestnut Hill, MA 24671850	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Lori	Hoyum	lhoyum@mnpower.com	Minnesota Power	30 West Superior Street Duluth, MN 55802	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jan	Hubbard	jan.hubbard@comcast.net		7730 Mississippi Lane Brooklyn Park, MN 55444	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Casey	Jacobson	cjacobson@bepc.com	Basin Electric Power Cooperative	1717 East Interstate Avenue Bismarck, ND 58501	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John S.	Jaffray	jjaffray@jjrpower.com	JJR Power	350 Highway 7 Suite 236 Excelsior, MN 55331	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Nate	Jones	njones@hcpd.com	Heartland Consumers Power	PO Box 248 Madison, SD 57042	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Michael	Kampmeyer	mkampmeyer@a-e- group.com	AEG Group, LLC	260 Salem Church Road Sunfish Lake, Minnesota 55118	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John	Kearney	jmkearney@MnSEIA.org	MnSEIA	2512 33rd Ave S Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kevin	Keene	kevin.keene@cummins.co m		N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jack	Kegel	jkegel@mmua.org	MMUA	3025 Harbor Lane N Suite 400 Plymouth, MN 55447-5142	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Julie	Ketchum	N/A	Waste Management	20520 Keokuk Ave Lakeville, MN 55044	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Madeleine	Klein	mklein@socoreenergy.com	SoCore Energy	225 W Hubbard Street Suite 200 Chicago, IL 60654	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Brad	Klein	bklein@elpc.org	Environmental Law & Policy Center	35 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 1600 Suite 1600 Chicago, IL 60601	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John	Kluempke	jwkluempke@winlectric.co m	Elk River Winlectric	12777 Meadowvale Rd Elk River, MN 55330	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jon	Kramer	jk2surf@aol.com	Sundial Solar	4708 york ave. S Minneapolis, MN 55410	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Michael	Krause	michaelkrause61@yahoo.c	Kandiyo Consulting, LLC	433 S 7th Street Suite 2025 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jeffrey L.	Landsman	jlandsman@wheelerlaw.co m	Wheeler, Van Sickle & Anderson, S.C.	44 E. Mifflin Street, 10th Floor Madison, WI 53703	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Harold	LeVander, Jr.	hlevander@felhaber.com	Felhaber, Larson, Fenton & Vogt, P.A.	Suite 2100 444 Cedar Street St. Paul, MN 551012136	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Dean	Leischow	dean@sunriseenergyventur es.com	Sunrise Energy Ventures	601 Carlson Parkway, Suite 1050 Minneapolis, MN 55305	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Deborah Fohr	Levchak	N/A	Basin Electric Power Cooperative	1717 East Interstate Avenue Bismarck, ND 585030564	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
John	Lindell	agorud.ecf@ag.state.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-RUD	1400 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012130	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Phillip	Lipetsky	greenenergyproductsllc@g mail.com	Green Energy Products	PO Box 108 Springfield, MN 56087	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Rebecca	Lundberg	rebecca.lundberg@powerfu llygreen.com	Powerfully Green	11451 Oregon Ave N Champlin, MN 55316	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Erica	McConnell	mcconnell@smwlaw.com	Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger LLP	396 Hayes St San Francisco, California 94102-4421	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Sara G	McGrane	smcgrane@felhaber.com	Felhaber Larson	220 S 6th St Ste 2200 Minneapolis, MN 55420	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Dave	McNary	David.McNary@hennepin.u s	Hennepin County DES	701 Fourth Ave S Ste 700 Minneapolis, MN 55415-1842	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John	McWilliams	jmm@dairynet.com	Dairyland Power Cooperative	3200 East Ave SPO Box 817 La Crosse, WI 54601-7227	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Thomas	Melone	Thomas.Melone@AllcoUS.com	Minnesota Go Solar LLC	222 South 9th Street Suite 1600 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55120	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Stacy	Miller	stacy.miller@state.mn.us	Department of Commerce	State Energy Office 85 7th Place East, St 500 St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service lite	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Alan	Miller	N/A		2210 20th St NE Stewartville, MN 55976	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
David	Moe	momentums@aol.com		2825 28th Ave S Minneapolis, MN 55406	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Darrick	Moe	darrick@mrea.org	Minnesota Rural Electric Association	11640 73rd Avenue North Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
David	Moeller	dmoeller@allete.com	Minnesota Power	30 W Superior St Duluth, MN 558022093	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Dalene	Monsebroten	dalene@mncable.net	Northern Municipal Power Agency	123 2nd St W Thief River Falls, MN 56701	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Andrew	Moratzka	andrew.moratzka@stoel.co m	Stoel Rives LLP	33 South Sixth St Ste 4200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Martin	Morud	mmorud@trunorthsolar.co m	Tru North Solar	5115 45th Ave S Minneapolis, MN 55417	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Ben	Nelson		СММРА	459 South Grove Street Blue Earth, MN 56013	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
David W.	Niles	david.niles@avantenergy.c om	Minnesota Municipal Power Agency	Suite 300 200 South Sixth Stree Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Will	Nissen	nissen@fresh-energy.org	Fresh Energy	408 St. Peter Street Ste 220 Saint Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Michael	Noble	noble@fresh-energy.org	Fresh Energy	Hamm Bldg., Suite 220 408 St. Peter Street St. Paul, MN 55102	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

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Rolf	Nordstrom	rnordstrom@gpisd.net	Great Plains Institute	2801 21ST AVE S STE 220 Minneapolis, MN 55407-1229	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Samantha	Norris	samanthanorris@alliantene rgy.com	Interstate Power and Light Company	200 1st Street SE PO Box 351 Cedar Rapids, IA 524060351	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jeff	O'Neill	jeff.oneill@ci.monticello.mn .us	City of Monticello	505 Walnut Street Suite 1 Monticelllo, Minnesota 55362	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Russell	Olson	rolson@hcpd.com	Heartland Consumers Power District	PO Box 248 Madison, SD 570420248	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Dan	Patry	dpatry@sunedison.com	SunEdison	600 Clipper Drive Belmont, CA 94002	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jeffrey C	Paulson	jeff.jcplaw@comcast.net	Paulson Law Office, Ltd.	7301 Ohms Ln Ste 325 Edina, MN 55439	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John	Pendray	john.pendray@cummins.co m		N/A	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Mary Beth	Peranteau	mperanteau@wheelerlaw.c	Wheeler Van Sickle & Anderson SC	44 E. Mifflin Street, 10th Floor Madison, WI 53703	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Donna	Pickard	dpickardgsss@gmail.com	Citizen	1215 Lilac Lane Excelsior, MN 55331	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
David G.	Prazak	dprazak@otpco.com	Otter Tail Power Company	P.O. Box 496 215 South Cascade S Fergus Falls, MN 565380496	Electronic Service treet	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Gayle	Prest	gayle.prest@minneapolism n.gov	City of Mpls Sustainability	350 South 5th St, #315 Minneapolis, MN 55415	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Mark	Rathbun	mrathbun@grenergy.com	Great River Energy	12300 Elm Creek Blvd Maple Grove, MN 55369	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Michael	Reinertson	michael.reinertson@avante nergy.com	Avant Energy	220 S. Sixth St. Ste 1300 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
John C.	Reinhardt		Laura A. Reinhardt	3552 26Th Avenue South Minneapolis, MN 55406	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kevin	Reuther	kreuther@mncenter.org	MN Center for Environmental Advocacy	26 E Exchange St, Ste 206 St. Paul, MN 551011667	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Craig	Rustad	crustad@minnkota.com	Minnkota Power	1822 Mill Road PO Box 13200 Grand Forks, ND 582083200	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List_PUC
Robert K.	Sahr	bsahr@eastriver.coop	East River Electric Power Cooperative	P.O. Box 227 Madison, SD 57042	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List_PUC
Richard	Savelkoul	rsavelkoul@martinsquires.com	Martin & Squires, P.A.	332 Minnesota Street Ste W2750 St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List_PUC
Larry L.	Schedin	Larry@LLSResources.com	LLS Resources, LLC	332 Minnesota St, Ste W1390 St. Paul, MN 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Kenric	Scheevel	kjs@dairynet.com	Dairyland Power Cooperative	3200 East Avenue South PO Box 817 La Crosse, Wisconsin 54602	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Christopher	Schoenherr	cp.schoenherr@smmpa.or g	SMMPA	500 First Ave SW Rochester, MN 55902-3303	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Dean	Sedgwick	N/A	Itasca Power Company	PO Box 457 Bigfork, MN 56628-0457	Paper Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
David	Shaffer	shaff081@gmail.com	Minnesota Solar Energy Industries Project	2952 Beechwood Ave Wayzata, MN 55391	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Doug	Shoemaker	dougs@mnRenewables.or g	MRES	2928 5th Ave S Minneapolis, MN 55408	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Mrg	Simon	mrgsimon@mrenergy.com	Missouri River Energy Services	3724 W. Avera Drive P.O. Box 88920 Sioux Falls, SD 571098920	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Trevor	Smith	trevor.smith@avantenergy.	Avant Energy, Inc.	220 South Sixth Street Suite 1300 Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Beth H.	Soholt	bsoholt@windonthewires.or g	Wind on the Wires	570 Asbury Street Suite 201 St. Paul, MN 55104	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Cary	Stephenson	cStephenson@otpco.com	Otter Tail Power Company	215 South Cascade Street Fergus Falls, MN 56537	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Eric	Swanson	eswanson@winthrop.com	Winthrop Weinstine	225 S 6th St Ste 3500 Capella Tower Minneapolis, MN 554024629	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Thomas P.	Sweeney III	tom.sweeney@easycleane nergy.com	Clean Energy Collective	P O Box 1828 Boulder, CO 80306-1828	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List_PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
SaGonna	Thompson	Regulatory.records@xcele nergy.com	Xcel Energy	414 Nicollet Mall FL 7 Minneapolis, MN 554011993	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Steve	Thompson	stevet@cmmpa.org	Central Minnesota Municipal Power Agency	459 S Grove St Blue Earth, MN 56013-2629	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Pat	Treseler	pat.jcplaw@comcast.net	Paulson Law Office LTD	Suite 325 7301 Ohms Lane Edina, MN 55439	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Sam	Villella	sdvillella@gmail.com		10534 Alamo Street NE Blaine, MN 55449	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Roger	Warehime	warehimer@owatonnautiliti es.com	Owatonna Public Utilities	208 South WalnutPO Box 800 Owatonna, MN 55060	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Paul	White	paul.white@prcwind.com	Project Resources Corp./Tamarac Line LLC/Ridgewind	618 2nd Ave SE Minneapolis, MN 55414	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Jason	Willett	jason.willett@metc.state.m n.us	Metropolitan Council	390 Robert St N Saint Paul, MN 55101-1805	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Daniel	Williams	DanWilliams.mg@gmail.co m	Powerfully Green	11451 Oregon Avenue N Champlin, MN 55316	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Randi	Winter	rwinter@felhaber.com	Felhaber Larson	Felhaber Larson 220 South Sixth Stree Suite 2200 Minneapolis, MN 55402	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List_PUC
Cam	Winton	cwinton@mnchamber.com	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce	400 Robert Street North Suite 1500 St. Paul, Minnesota 55101	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC

First Name	Last Name	Email	Company Name	Address	Delivery Method	View Trade Secret	Service List Name
Robyn	Woeste	robynwoeste@alliantenerg y.com	Interstate Power and Light Company	200 First St SE Cedar Rapids, IA 52401	Electronic Service		OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Daniel P	Wolf	dan.wolf@state.mn.us	Public Utilities Commission	121 7th Place East Suite 350 St. Paul, MN 551012147	Electronic Service		OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC
Thomas J.	Zaremba	TZaremba@wheelerlaw.co	WHEELER, VAN SICKLE & ANDERSON	44 E. Mifflin Street, 10th Floor Madison, WI 53703	Electronic Service	No	OFF_SL_15-755_Official Service List _PUC