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March 3, 2021



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

RE: In the Matter of an Inquiry into Utility Investments that May Assist in Minnesota's Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic Docket No. EG999/CI-20-492 Supplemental Comments

Dear Mr. Seuffert:

Otter Tail Power Company (Otter Tail) submits these Supplemental Comments in the above-referenced docket to further refine its request to advance certain projects for purposes of stimulating economic recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In these Comments, Otter Tail: (1) provides an update on 12 projects originally submitted in the June 17, 2020 report, (2) provides an update on the current status of the three remaining projects left for recovery inclusion in this docket, and (3) creates clarity for appropriate proceedings and associated recovery options available to move these projects forward.

Otter Tail 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 the Energy Resources and the Office of the Attorney General-Residential Utilities Division. A Certificate of Service is also enclosed.

If you have any questions regarding this filing, please contact me at (218) 739-8279 or at stommerdahl@otpco.com.

Sincerely,

/s/ STUART TOMMERDAHL
Stuart Tommerdahl
Manager, Regulatory Administration

tlk Enclosures By electronic filing c: Service List



STATE OF MINNESOTA BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

In the Matter of an Inquiry into Utility Investments that May Assist in Minnesota's Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic **Docket Nos. EG999/CI-20-492**

OTTER TAIL POWER COMPANY SUPPLEMENTAL COMMENTS

I. OVERVIEW

Otter Tail's June 17, 2020 initial filing in this proceeding included 12 ongoing, planned, or possible projects/investments that meet the objectives set forth by the Commission to:

- Provide significant utility system benefits;
- Are consistent with approved resource plans, approved natural gas distribution infrastructure or pipeline safety plans, triennial conservation plans, and existing Commission orders;
- Reduce carbon or other pollutant emissions in the power sector or across economic sectors;
- Increase access to conservation and clean energy resources for Minnesotans;
- Create jobs or otherwise assist in economic recovery for Minnesotans;
- And use woman, veteran, or minority owned businesses as much as possible and provide documentation of these efforts.

In Otter Tail's September 17, 2020 Comments an update was provided on the original 12 projects. Eight of the projects remained in the First Tranche request with three of these projects; Hoot Lake Solar, Acceleration of Streetlight Transition from HID to LED and Increase CIP Rebates for Heat Pumps and POP Solar included in a different method of recovery. The five remaining projects; System Infrastructure and Reliability (SIRI), Telecommunications Projects, Acceleration of Distribution of Transmission Vegetation Management, Ground Line Inspection, and Minnesota (MN) Buildings Maintenance remained as projects with a needed method for recovery.

Since the September 17, 2020 Comments, Otter Tail has further narrowed the projects still needing a method for recovery. This filing requests recovery for three remaining project categories identified below in Table 1, System Infrastructure and Reliability, Acceleration of Distribution and Transmission Vegetation Management, and MN Buildings Maintenance. Table 1 below provides a status update on the 12 original projects and the recovery type requested and/or approved.

Table 1

	A	В	С		D	E
Line No.		Cost Recovery Mechanism (Docket)	Removed from COVID-19 Economic Recover Request Yes or No	Estimated Project Cost- LOW End	Estimated Project Cost - TOP End	
1	Hoot Lake Solar	Eligibility Filing E017-M-20-844 Renewable Rider (RRCR)	Yes			
2	System Infrastructure and Reliability (SIRI)	MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719 Deferred Accounting	No	\$10,000,000	\$15,000,000	Spring 2021
3	Telecommunications Projects	MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719	Yes			
4	Acceleration of Distribution and Transmission Vegetation Management (VM)	MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719 Deferred Accounting	No	\$4,520,000	\$4,520,000	Winter 2021
5	Ground Line Inspection	MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719	Yes			
6	Acceleration of Community Streetlight Transition from HID to LED	MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719	Yes			
7	Increase CIP Rebates for Heat Pumps and POP Solar	E017-CIP-20-475	Yes			
8	Building Maintenance (Minnesota Buildings Only)	Capital Rider Deferred Accounting Capital Rider	No	\$11,370,000	\$11,370,000	Once approval is received we can begin RFP process for a Spring start
9	Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI)	EUIC Rider	Yes			
10	Load Management System Replacement	EUIC Rider	Yes			
11	Advanced Distribution Management (Outage Management System)	EUIC Rider	Yes			
12	Electric Vehicle Infrastructure and Rate Pilot, Docket E017/M-20-181- APPROVED	E017-M-20-181 Approved	Yes			

II. UPDATE ON PROJECTS

A. Status of projects no longer needing action in this Docket

Otter Tail originally submitted 12 projects in the June 17, 2020 Initial Filing. Subsequently, Otter Tail has reviewed and filed for recovery of nine of these projects through different riders and/or the most recent MN Rate Case. Listed below is an update on the nine projects that have either been approved or requested in a different recovery method.

1. Hoot Lake Solar – Otter Tail filed an eligibility filing on November 25, 2020, Docket E017/M-20-844. Otter Tail Power requested the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (Commission) determine the 49.9 megawatt (MW) Hoot Lake Solar Project to be constructed at the site of the existing Hoot Lake power plant qualifies for application toward Otter Tail's solar energy standard (SES)

obligations. Otter Tail further requests the Commission authorize, as described herein, 100 percent of the output of the project to be allocated for use by Minnesota Customers and 100 percent of Otter Tail's investment in the project eligible for future cost recovery from Minnesota customers through Otter Tail's Renewable Resource Cost Recovery (RRCR) rider.

Recovery Mechanism: Assuming favorable eligibility determination, actual costs to be recovered will be presented by Otter Tail in a future RRCR rider petition.

2. Telecommunications Projects – To facilitate the gathering of data necessary to operate its electrical system, Otter Tail utilizes leased communications lines and a microwave communication system which is reaching its end of life and technological obsolescence. Otter Tail has therefore identified a need to install fiber optic communication to replace its existing systems. The telecommunications strategy is to build fiber infrastructure for the use of current communications (network connectivity) and meet future connectivity requirements for all Otter Tail business units. This includes connectivity to customer service centers, plants, and transmission substations and includes the future buildout to warehouse locations, meter collector sites, and distribution substations. The connectivity is for applications such as the energy management system, industrial control network systems, security control applications and enterprise voice and data applications. In the near term, Otter Tail has identified two specific projects in the Alexandria and Canby, Minnesota areas to install fiber optic communications routes that would replace currently leased lines as well as the microwave system in those areas.

Recovery Mechanism: Included as part of MN Rate Case, Docket E017/GR-20-719, filed on November 2, 2020.

3. Ground Line Inspection – This project consists of performing groundline inspection on 41.6 kV transmission poles. Contracted vendors inspect the health of poles, which includes inspecting for damage or rot and documenting their findings.

Recovery Mechanism: Included as part of MN Rate Case, Docket E017/GR-20-719, filed on November 2, 2020.

4. Acceleration of Community Streetlight Transition from HID to LED – The LED conversion project was originally filed and approved by the MPUC and approved by the Department of Commerce in Otter Tail's 2017-2020 Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) Triennial plan in Docket No. E017-CIP-116-16, to be a five-year project including years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. The project consists of Otter Tail converting all 20,000+ Companyowned street and area lights in Minnesota to LED technology. Otter Tail believes an opportunity exists to accelerate the project in 2021 to complete the project one year earlier. This will save energy purchases, reduce maintenance expense on existing lighting, and provide more aesthetic lighting for customers.

Recovery Mechanism: Included as part of MN Rate Case, Docket E017/GR-20-719, filed on November 2, 2020.

5. Increase CIP Rebates for Heat Pumps and POP Solar - Currently Otter Tail has programs for electric Heat Pumps and a Publicly-Owned Property (POP) Solar program included in its 2020 CIP plan. Otter Tail is considering increasing the customer rebates to spur further program participation by its Minnesota customers. Otter Tail believes an increase in customer rebates to these programs will enable more customers to install these systems and realize the benefits they provide in cost savings and energy savings or production.

Recovery Mechanism: Approved in Docket E017/CIP-20-475 on November 24, 2020.

- 6. Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) The AMI planned project is made up of several components. Advanced meters will be installed at nearly every service location. Collectors will be placed in local areas to receive the data from the meters and transmit it to a head-end system where the data will be stored and made available to certain other Otter Tail systems, such as a meter data management system (MDM), the customer information system, and an outage management system. AMI will enhance customers' experience by providing real time information and customer options. Upon completion of the project, customers will be able to receive outage notifications and have access to hourly usage data which would assist them with conservation efforts. Meter reading and service changes would be handled remotely, decreasing costs and risks that come with onsite work.
- 7. Load Management System (LMS) Replacement Otter Tail's current load management system is nearing its end of life. The load management system is what is used to control load at a customer's location as required for subscription to demand response rates and programs. Current Remote Transmit Controllers (RTCs) are no longer sold or supported by the manufacturer. Even if the equipment were available, significant investment would need to be made to keep the system running in its current state. The AMI project, currently being developed at Otter Tail Power and described above, provides potential to upgrade and greatly expand the current program offering. This upgrade could include adding new receivers, switches, software, and programming logic. By upgrading the system, Otter Tail will have the ability to offer additional rates to its current nine rates that utilize the current load management system.
- **8.** Advanced Distribution Management System (ADMS) Otter Tail's planned ADMS platform offers many modules to modernize our grid and operations, including an Outage Management System (OMS) module. An OMS will allow Otter Tail to better manage outages, which will reduce total interruption minutes to customers, and it will allow Otter Tail to better communicate with customers during outage events, such as notifying them of the estimated time of

restoration, etc. The ADMS also has other modules that Otter Tail plans to pursue in some future timeframe, such as volt-var optimization, load management controls, and automated system reconfiguration.

Recovery Mechanism: Otter Tail is currently developing an eligibility filing in an Electric Utility Infrastructure Costs (EUIC) Rider which will include AMI, LMS Replacement and ADMS (Outage Management). The eligibility filing for the EUIC Rider is scheduled for early March 2021.

9. Electric Vehicle Infrastructure and Rate Pilot – On January 31, 2020, Otter Tail filed with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission a pilot project to build, own and operate 11 direct current fast charging (DCFC) EV sites in its Minnesota service territory. In addition to the 11 DCFC sites, Otter Tail proposed to add an additional 10 Level 2 EV charging sites. Currently Otter Tail only serves one DCFC location in its Minnesota service territory which was developed by Otter Tail. Otter Tail's plan will expand DCFC sites to all areas of its Minnesota service area so 100 percent of customers are within 60 miles of a DCFC. Otter Tail's plan will prevent range anxiety from prospective EV ownership ensuring EV owners that fast charging options are available throughout Otter Tail's rural territory. The plan should increase EV ownership among customers and encourage more EV owners to travel throughout the service area.

Recovery Mechanism: Approved in Docket E017/M-20-181, August 27, 2020.

B. Status of projects needing action in this Docket

For the remaining three projects identified in Table 2, Otter Tail is requesting approval of deferred accounting as a mechanism for recovery in this Docket. Otter Tail believes that the Commission's timely approval of these projects with the proposed recovery approach, as described below, will mitigate rate impacts. By authorizing deferred accounting for the annual revenue requirements until the projects are included in a rate case following their in-service dates, there will be no immediate rate impact. Future rate impacts will be the then current annual revenue requirements of the projects in the test year of a future rate case and a portion of the

deferred balance existing at that time. The annual amount of the deferral to be included in the test year will depend on the amortization proposed for recovery for the balance of the deferred amount. By using this approach, there is no current impact and future rate impacts can be moderated in the rate case as circumstances dictate at that time.

1. System Infrastructure and Reliability (SIRI) – The bulk of the SIRI projects represent replacement of aged transmission and distribution (T&D) facilities across Otter Tail's service territory. Otter Tail has identified a need to increase the rate of replacements, as its current replacement programs are not adequate to keep pace with the high rate of upcoming asset retirement. This includes transmission line replacement projects, cutout failure replacement programs, increased underground replacement programs, distribution substation replacement programs, and distribution line replacement programs. The ideal average age of transmission poles is around half of the expected 70-year life of a pole or about 35 years. With Otter Tail's current average spend, the Company would be setting a replacement pace that has a calculated expected life of transmission poles of around 110 years. This is nearly 60 percent longer than the high end of average expected pole age. Historically, this has not been of concern due to the vintage of the assets in the field; however, a larger influx of asset is approaching average end of life. Statistically, the current average age of the transmission pole fleet is 45 years old and has been growing around half of a year per year. The proposed projects will reverse the trend of increasing average age of poles. The SIRI projects are a mix of both ongoing and planned projects. Otter Tail has a significant amount of information and analysis supporting the identified need and benefits of increasing the rate of replacement. Current rates of replacement are constrained by cost recovery approaches that assume spending will correspond generally with historic annual depreciation expense (if routine annual depreciation expense is exceeded, it generally causes under-recovery) The range in estimates of SIRI are amounts above historical replacement spending to replace aging infrastructure. The amounts also represent numerous smaller T&D construction projects therefore a start and end date are more continual than infinite. Otter Tail utilizes contractors when the

internal labor force is not available to complete projects, which will be the case in 2021. Timing is of a concern in order to secure and onboard contractors. Timely approval of an increased 2021 budget is needed to secure additional labor forces. The bulk of the SIRI projects represent replacement of aged T&D facilities across Otter Tail's service territory. We have identified a need to increase the rate of replacements, as our current replacement programs are not adequate to keep pace with the high rate of upcoming asset retirement. As noted earlier, this includes transmission line replacement projects, cutout failure replacement programs, increased underground replacement programs, distribution substation replacement programs, and distribution line replacement programs.

2. Acceleration of Distribution and Transmission Vegetation Management

- (VM) Otter Tail vegetation management contractors would be secured to perform vegetation management on Otter Tail's distribution feeders and transmission systems. This activity can also include sterilization of substations for vegetation including noxious weeds in distribution and transmission substations. All work to be completed is ongoing and planned, and Otter Tail generally sets routine annual budget amounts. These budget amounts can be temporarily modified/increased when economic conditions require (e.g., to adjust for changes in utility revenues). By assuring adequate recovery, of spending exceeding current budgeted amounts, Otter Tail can accelerate vegetation management work beyond typical annual projections and enhance reliability. If approved, Otter Tail can communicate with contractors and assure them its needs for 2021 which will allow them to confidently hire and employ more staff to meet that need.
- 3. Minnesota (MN) Buildings Maintenance Otter Tail has 65 buildings throughout its service territory. Many of the buildings are used by field personnel for purposes of responding to customers spread out widely due to Otter Tail's large sparsely populated service territory. Many of Otter Tail's dispersed buildings need repair or replacement as they do not provide a

reasonable workspace for employees to use as outposts for their work and storage for their equipment and tools. Fifty-seven percent of Otter Tail's buildings are over 50 years old. Today's vehicles, pickups, bucket trucks, digger derricks, etc., are much larger than they were 50-60 years ago and in many cases no longer able to fit in the Company's buildings. Some of these vehicles cost up to \$350k and would be better preserved if stored out of the elements. Inside storage would also improve response times to power outages in severe weather, preventing the need for clearing snow and ice from the windshield or loading materials in the pouring rain. In addition to increasing the size for newer larger trucks, repairs are needed to keep out the elements at these remote buildings, such as new doors, windows, roofs, rusted and damaged siding, etc. Other repairs are for worn furnishings like flooring, ceilings, paint, etc. In some cases, it may be more cost effective to replace rather than repair. With needing extra room to fit the vehicles into the building and the needed repairs, Otter Tail has flagged one-third of its buildings as needing to be replaced. The following list summarizes several of these projects:

- 1. Replacement of 10 MN area service buildings. \$8M
- **2.** Replacement of 5 area service building and CSC roofs- \$380k (4 additional roofs if buildings are not replaced within 5-10 years. Additional \$240k)
- 3. Storage racks/ pole bunks \$200k
- **4.** New siding for area service buildings-\$300k
- 5. New lighting for area service buildings \$80k
- **6.** Area service building overhead and walk-through doors- \$60k
- 7. Pole yard fencing- \$100k
- **8.** Area service building interior (flooring, ceilings, bathrooms, paint, etc.) \$150k
- 9. Fergus Falls office building improvements (flooring, fire and sprinkler systems, HVAC, parking lots, lighting) \$2M (Most of the building maintenance items are planned and/or potential dependent upon funding. Otter Tail expects that with approval the RFP process can begin with repairs and replacements starting as soon as Spring 2021.)

C. Project Summary

Table 2 below summarizes the three projects discussed above which could be advanced to help stimulate local economic recovery and at the same time meeting critical needs for Otter Tail Power.

Table 2

	А	В	С	D	E
		Cost Recovery	Estimated Project Cost-	Estimated Project Cost -	
Line No.	Project	Mechanism	LOW End	TOP End	Estimated Start Date
1	System Infrastructure and Reliability	MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719			
2	(SIRI) Acceleration of Distribution and Transmission Vegetation Management	Deferred Accounting MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719	\$10,000,000	\$15,000,000	Spring 2021
	(VM)	Deferred Accounting	\$4,520,000	\$4,520,000	Winter 2021
3	Building Maintenance	MN Rate Case E017-GR-20-719			Once approval is received we can begin RFP process for
	(Minnesota Buildings Only)	Deferred Accounting	\$11,370,000	\$11,370,000	a Spring start

D. Separate Docket Alternative

As this current Docket has sought input from all Minnesota electric and gas utilities with regard to potential projects the respective companies considered advancing projects, with subsequent rounds of comments being more targeted at other specific utility requests. Otter Tail is fine with continuing to move our projects forward within this Docket. However, should the Commission find it administratively more efficient or desirable to move Otter Tail's request to a new Docket, Otter Tail would be supportive of that alternative as well.

III. CONCLUSION

Otter Tail has narrowed its request for seeking recovery of accelerated capital and O&M spending to three categories as discussed above. These projects are easily accelerated subject to contractor and material availability, and clearly address critical needs in Otter Tail's ability to continue providing reliable service to its customers by replacing or updating key aging infrastructure. These projects will also provide near term economic impacts to the areas we serve. The Company thanks the Commission for considering its request and respectfully seeks Commission support in helping Otter Tail move forward with these projects.

Dated: March 3, 2021

Respectfully submitted,

OTTER TAIL POWER COMPANY

By: /s/STUART TOMMERDAHL
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Manager, Regulatory Administration
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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

RE: In the Matter of an Inquiry into Utility Investments that May Assist in Minnesota's Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic Docket No. EG999/CI-20-492

I, Tammy Kubela, hereby certify that I have this day served a copy of the following, or a summary thereof, on Will Seuffert 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 Supplemental Comments

Dated: March 3, 2021

/s/ Tammy Kubela

Tammy Kubela Regulatory Filing Coordinator Otter Tail Power Company 215 South Cascade Street Fergus Falls MN 56537 (218) 739-8807

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Generic Notice	Residential Utilities Division	residential.utilities@ag.stat e.mn.us	Office of the Attorney General-RUD	1400 BRM Tower 445 Minnesota St St. Paul, MN 551012131	Electronic Service	Yes	OFF_SL_20-492_Official
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