

22-00154-UT; Bench Request Order

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Tue 11/8/2022 9:57 AM

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BEFORE THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

**IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY INTO ELECTRIC)
PUBLIC UTILITIES' VEGETATION MANAGEMENT)
PLANS AND PROCEDURES)**

Case No. 22-00154-UT

Sincerely,
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BEFORE THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

**IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY INTO ELECTRIC)
PUBLIC UTILITIES' VEGETATION MANAGEMENT) Case No. 22-00154-UT
PLANS AND PROCEDURES)**

BENCH REQUEST ORDER

THIS MATTER comes before the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (“NMPRC or Commission”) in this case, upon motion of Commission Chair Cynthia Hall, pursuant to 1.2.2.30(B) NMAC; wherefore, being duly advised,

THE COMMISSION FINDS AND CONCLUDES:

1. The Commission, on June 15, 2022, issued the “Notice of Inquiry” opening this docket to consider the adequacy of New Mexico public utilities’ wildfire protection and vegetation management plans and these plans impacts on the provision of electrical service to their customers and grid reliability.

2. The Notice of Inquiry required all investor-owned electric utilities and rural electric cooperative organizations to provide copies of their vegetation management plans and any other wildfire protection plans.

3. Only July 6, 2022, the following utilities provided responses to the Notice of Inquiry: Duncan Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.; El Paso Electric Company (“EPE”), Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, Inc.; Lea County Electric Cooperative, Inc.; New Mexico Rural Electric Cooperative Association; Public Service Company of New Mexico (“PNM”); and Southwestern Public Service Company (“SPS”).

4. To further clarify potential issues in this inquiry, the investor owned electric public utilities and rural electric cooperatives, identified below, shall, individually, file responses to this Bench Request Order.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED:

A) No later than 5:00 P.M. on November 17,2022, all rural electric cooperatives, EPE, PNM, and SPS shall respond to the following inquiries:

1) Do you divide your service territory into different fire weather zones?

2) Do you currently have an ignition management plan (i.e., procedures and practices in the event of a fire igniting in your service territory) or have you begun to develop one? If yes, please describe its status; if not, please explain.

3) To the extent that you have plans on vegetation management and wildfire mitigation, what challenges have you faced in implementing those plans, including but not limited to funding challenges and potential solutions?

B) No later than 5:00 P.M. on November 17, 2022, EPE shall respond to the following inquiries:

1) Your “Vegetation Management Report” only mentions distribution lines. Do you have different vegetation management standards that are applied to transmission lines?

2) Your Vegetation Management Report claims to base clearance standards on American National Standards Institute Standard Z 133.1. That standard specifies the distance between an arborist’s equipment and an electrified source and serves as a safety requirement rather than a vegetation management requirement. What is the basis for using a worker safety requirement for a vegetation management requirement?

i) Do you apply different criteria to different types of trees and/or equipment?

3) Your Vegetation Management Report states that you include “all pertinent information” regarding vegetation management in a database. Please provide examples of such “pertinent” information.

i) Is there more than one database? If so, how many?

ii) Where is the database(s) located?

iii) Is the database(s) networked, unified, and standardized to facilitate data sharing?

4) You provided a document entitled “Fire Protection Design Criterion.” This document addresses fire prevention at the site of a substation but it does not mention wildfires specifically.

i) Does your service area include any areas in which wildfires are a concern?

ii) Do you have any wildfire standards or a wildfire mitigation plan?

iii) Do you consider the Fire Protection Design Criterion a part of a wildfire mitigation plan?

iv) Do you currently have or are you developing an ignition management plan, or are you otherwise tracking wildfires? Please explain.

5) Do you have any policies or procedures related to public safety power shutoffs. If so, please provide such policies and procedures and state whether they are considered a part of your wildfire mitigation plans. If not, please explain why not.

C) No later than 5:00 P.M. on November 17, 2022, PNM shall respond to the following inquiries:

1) Your “Wildfire Mitigation Plan” specifically states that asset age and condition information is known “locally” and “anecdotally.” Since issuing your Wildfire Mitigation Plan, have you taken steps to begin recording this information in your geographic information system? If not, why not? Please describe specific barriers, if any.

2) Your Wildfire Mitigation Plan specifically mentions initiating ignition management plans to collect data on ignition sources. Have you completed an ignition management plan or otherwise begun developing one? If not, please explain why not.

3) Your Wildfire Mitigation Plan specifically mentions the development of a surface program as an alternative to undergrounding. Has this program been implemented or developed further since issuing your Wildfire Mitigation Plan? If not, please explain why not.

4) Since you issued your Wildfire Mitigation Plan, have you developed any ideas that are not contained in the plan for wildfire mitigation, including new technologies or methodologies?

5) Do you currently have, or are you developing, an ignition management plan, or are you otherwise tracking wildfires? Please explain.

D) No later than 5:00 P.M. on November 17, 2022, SPS shall respond to the following inquiries:

1) Do you have a specific wildfire mitigation and/or a wildfire response plan? If so, please provide it. If not, please explain why not.

2) Do you currently have an ignition management plan or similar system in place to track sources of equipment-related ignitions to provide data to help mitigate future fires? If so, please provide it. If not, please explain why not.

3) Do you have any policies or procedures related to public safety power shutoffs? If so, are these considered as part of your wildfire mitigation plans? And if so, please provide them. If not, please explain why not.

E) No later than 5:00 P.M. on November 17, 2022, SPS and PNM shall respond to the following inquiries:

1) Your plans mention the Bramble and Byrnes method for vegetation management. Is this method adapted for high desert environments?

2) Are there limits to how you apply the Bramble and Byrnes method (i.e., specific areas where it is appropriate)?

3) What are the shortcomings of applying this method?

4) Your plans mention that vegetation debris is generally the responsibility of the landowner. Have there been any ignition issues with slash piles or stacked logs?

5) How do you monitor, if at all, landowners' collection of debris?

6) How long does it take for landowners to collect debris?

F) Copies of this Order shall be emailed to all persons listed on the attached Certificate of Service if their email addresses are known, and if not know, mailed by regular mail.

G) This Order is issued by the Chair of the Commission as authorized by 1.2.2.30(B) of the Commission's Rules on Procedure.

H) This Order is effective immediately.

ISSUED at Santa Fe, New Mexico, this 8th day of November, 2022

NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

/s/ Cynthia Hall, electronically signed
COMMISSIONER CYNTHIA HALL, CHAIR



BEFORE THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

**IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY INTO ELECTRIC)
PUBLIC UTILITIES' VEGETATION MANAGEMENT) Case No. 22-00154-UT
PLANS AND PROCEDURES)**

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I CERTIFY that on this date I sent, via email only, a true and correct copy of the foregoing

Bench Request Order to the electric companies' contacts listed below.

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DATED this 8th day of November, 2022.

NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

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