

350 Montana

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For Immediate Release:

Thursday, December 5, 2019

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Ratepayer Rebellion Rally!

Ratepayers to tell the MT Public Service Commission, 'Montana Can Lead'

Missoula, MT. On Monday, December 9, at noon, outside the Public Service Commission (PSC) office in Helena (1701 Prospect Ave) 350 Montana, with citizens and allies, will hold a Ratepayer Rebellion Rally emphasizing that, "*Montana Can Lead*".

Speakers from around the state, including some 2020 PSC candidates running for open seats, will ask the PSC to listen to ratepayers' public comments regarding NorthWestern Energy's Resource Procurement Plan, currently in front of the PSC for their comments and input. The PSC is open for comments on NorthWestern Energy's 20-year Procurement Plan until January 3, but will hold the only mandated Public Hearings following the Rally at 1:30pm and 5:00pm.

"It is the job of the Public Service Commission to provide Montanans with affordable and reliable energy at a just rate. To do so, the company must model Montana's real world conditions," said Jeff Smith, Co-Chair of 350 Montana. "Even NorthWestern's vice president, Michael Cushell, says Colstrip will be closing within the decade. The company's procurement plan must be a complete work of fiction because it says the company will rely on Colstrip through 2042. I don't see how the PSC could authorize any new acquisitions paid for by the ratepayers without an accurate Colstrip shutdown date and comprehensive modeling of lower-cost wind and solar energy backed by battery storage."

NorthWestern Energy (NWE) wants to build a fleet of expensive fracked gas power plants, continue using a filthy coal-fired power plant for 20 years, and force Montana families and small businesses to pay for all of it. No significant renewable energy advances are being proposed.

350 Montana members see stark insufficiencies on multiple levels of this procurement plan and will urge the PSC to work with the utility to remedy the following:

- NWE does not give a cost analysis of their existing resources, which leaves ratepayers in the dark on whether or not what they are paying for is an undue burden. *Request that NorthWestern Energy model cost-effectiveness for all their generating assets to determine if customers are getting a fair shake.*
- NWE proposes building 800 MW of new gas peaker plants that will only hypothetically be used during a few hours of ultra-high demand. This is a gross waste of ratepayer dollars and is not as cost-effective as wind, solar, storage, and demand-side management when

evaluated together in a system. It is unwise to spend money on carbon-intensive purchases when other utilities around the west are accounting for a renewable energy transition. *Request that NWE consider opportunities like pumped hydro storage to address peak demand and/or new solar projects coupled with battery storage, not more gas plants that will cost ratepayers and line the pockets of shareholders.*

Deficiencies 350 Montana members will ask the PSC to request NWE to add to their plan include:

- Failing to identify, manage, and mitigate the risk that the Colstrip power plant will go offline within the 20-year planning horizon. *Request NWE add it to the plan.*
- Failing to include the cost of gas pipelines in the cost assumption for building and operating gas-fired power plants. NWE has previously stated new gas pipelines would be necessary to operate any significant new gas power plants on its system, however these costs were not included in the plan. *Request NWE add it to the plan.*
- Failing to include costs for a Colstrip decommissioning and cleanup plan for NWE's current and future responsibilities of the coal ash ponds clean-up after Colstrip shuts down, to remediate these wastes for the citizens of Colstrip. *Request NWE add it to the plan.*

“Montana can lead the global transition to clean energy. We are blessed with amazing resources for harnessing renewables: wind, sun, water, and elevation—all of which add up to a strong energy future,” said Winona Bateman, founder of Families for a Livable Climate. “We can create jobs and income for rural Montanans, lower costs for ratepayers, and keep our water, land, and big sky country safe from fossil fuel spills and pollution to ensure a livable future for all families. We can lead, and if we lead, the world will be watching.”

350 Montana works to reduce atmospheric CO2 concentrations to 350 ppm by implementing strategic actions and advocating policies to end fossil fuel burning with the greatest urgency.

For more information on 350 Montana, or to make a comment on the NWE Procurement Plan visit: www.350montana.org.

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NOTE TO PRESS: *Members of 350 Montana and other speakers will be available for interviews at the Rally on Monday, December 9, at noon.*