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State of Utah

Department of Commerce Division of Public Utilities

CHRIS PARKER
Executive Director

ARTIE POWELL
Director, Division of Public Utilities

Action Request Response

To: Public Service Commission of Utah

From: Utah Division of Public Utilities

Artie Powell, Director

Brenda Salter, Utility Technical Consultant Supervisor

Paul Hicken, Technical Consultant

Date: December 17, 2020

Re: **Docket No. 20-035-46, Rocky Mountain Power's 2021 Strategic Communications and Outreach Action Plan and Budget.**

Recommendation (Approval)

The Division of Public Utilities (Division) has reviewed the filing and verified that it complies with the Public Service Commission's (Commission) order in Docket No. 09-035-36. The Division recommends that the Commission approve Rocky Mountain Power's (Company or RMP) Strategic Communications and Outreach 2021 Action Plan and Budget.

Issue

On December 10, 2020, the Company filed with the Commission its Annual Outreach Action Plan and Budget for Demand Side Management for January 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021, (2021 Plan). The plan was previously circulated to the DSM Steering Committee on December 2, 2020. The Company is proposing a budget of \$1.5 million with a January 11, 2021, effective date. The Commission issued an Action Request to the Division on December 10, 2020, to review the application and make recommendations on the Company's filing by

January 4, 2021. On December 16, 2020, the Commission issued a Notice of Filing and Comment Period for interested parties to submit comments on or before Monday, January 4, 2021. This memorandum responds to the Commission's Action Request.

Background

On June 11, 2009, in Docket No. 09-035-36, the Commission issued an order approving the implementation of an outreach and communications program in Utah for the Company's energy efficiency and peak management programs (Campaign) for a period of three years ending June 30, 2012. The Company proposed continuing the Campaign and requested an 18-month implementation period for year four to align the Campaign with the Company's annual planning effort and Energy Efficiency and Peak Reduction report. The intent of the Campaign was to increase awareness and participation in the Company's energy efficiency and peak reduction programs. In subsequent dockets, the Commission has approved the Company's Annual Strategic Communications and Outreach Action Plan and Budget.

Discussion

The Campaign's objective is to promote energy efficiency and energy conservation through education as well as increased awareness of the benefits associated with the efficient use of energy and participation in the Company's programs. It is noteworthy, however, that during the past year the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on many of the small business customers and energy efficiency became a lesser priority. Nevertheless, according to Company surveys the importance of energy conservation remained strong among residential customers. The Company has developed an action plan for 2021 that includes increased direct mail and email in addition to trade shows, school programs, TV advertising, digital media, social media, online and radio advertising. The Company also included a draft budget detailing the allocation of funds into each budget item.

The 2021 Campaign will continue using the "being wattsmart" campaign to create wider visibility of the benefits energy efficiency provides businesses and residential customers in Utah. Also, the 2021 Campaign will continue to target customers with ads in Spanish and translating other promotional materials into Spanish where appropriate

The Company will use market research to continually improve awareness efforts for energy efficiency to support “wattsmart” programs and energy conservation in general. Specifically, the strategy going forward is as follows:

- Continue to promote “being wattsmart” to support Rocky Mountain Power’s “Powering Your Greatness” brand essence that empowers customers with options to save energy and money;
- Increase advertising to targeted media channels with adjustments for trends, cost and impact;
- Inspire the next generation of energy savers through the school programs;
- Assist customers impacted by COVID-19 with monthly Small Business Insight reports;
- Engage customers online and through direct email;
- Continued research and program evaluation to measure successful implementation and awareness.

The Company will continue to conduct customer surveys using third-party independent marketing research firms. Survey results from the third quarter of 2020 show that over 84% of residential customers say the Company does a good job of offering solutions that help customers use energy efficiently and in providing information on how to control electricity costs. Likewise, about 74% of commercial customers reported positively regarding the Company’s efforts in offering solutions that help customers use energy efficiently and in providing information on how to control electricity costs. The Company also plans in 2021 to continue participation in the “Be wattsmart, Begin at Home” campaign with schools. This is a popular program that in 2020 provided one-hour interactive assemblies to about 15,140 fifth-grade students in more than 200 schools.

The proposed budget for 2021 of \$1.5 million is consistent with past Campaign budgets and is also in compliance with the budget amount of \$1.5 million set in the 09-035-36 docket of June 11, 2009.

The Division notes that the 2021 Campaign is comparatively similar to previous years and seems to be effectively accomplishing the goals of the program. Various aspects of the proposed filing including forecasted budgets were reviewed and discussed with the Company, and timely well-informed responses were received.

Conclusion

The Division recognizes the importance of informed customers in order to enhance energy efficiency improvements and promote market transformation. The Company's Campaign appears to support this effort. The Division recommends that the Commission approve the Company's 2021 Strategic Communications and Outreach Plan and Budget for its Demand Side Management Program.

Cc: Michael Snow, Rocky Mountain Power
Michele Beck, Office of Consumer Services
Service List