BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF COLORADO

DOCKET NO. 16A-0396E

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE COMPANY OF COLORADO FOR APPROVAL OF ITS 2016 ELECTRIC RESOURCE PLAN.

RESPONSE OF THE COLORADO INDEPENDENT ENERGY ASSOCIATION TO THE SUSTAINABLE POWER GROUP, LLC MOTION FOR WAIVER OF COMMISSION RULE 3902(C)

The Colorado Independent Energy Association ("CIEA"), by its undersigned counsel, hereby responds as follows to the Motion for Waiver of Commission Rule 3902(c) ("Motion" or "sPower Motion") filed by Sustainable Power Group, LLC ("sPower") in this application of Public Service Company of Colorado's ("PSCo") for approval of its 2016 Electric Resource Plan ("ERP") pursuant to Colorado Public Utility Commission ("Commission") Rule 1308(a) and Commission Decision C16-1036-I.

I. Summary of the Argument

In its Motion, sPower requests that the Commission invalidate Section 4 CCR 723-3-3902(c) ("Rule 3902(c)" or the "Rule") of its Rules Regulating Electric Utilities regarding procedures for Qualifying Facility ("QF") power suppliers to enter into contracts as provided by the Public Utilities Regulatory Policy Act of 1978 ("PURPA"), as implemented by Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ("FERC") rules and orders, and as further implemented in each state's discretion. The Motion further requests that the Commission take "immediate" actions in this proceeding to comply with PURPA. The immediate actions requested include: 1) waiver and suspension of Rule 3902(c), 2) an order requiring PSCo to immediately fill any resource need with QF energy and capacity

purchased at 3) newly calculated avoided costs prior to the beginning of – and effectively in lieu of – a Phase II competitive solicitation process.

It is clear to CIEA that PURPA implementation constituting appropriate QF and avoided cost methodology in Colorado has been challenged and should be re-visited in light of evolving FERC declaratory orders. CIEA therefore agrees with the Motion to the extent that it raises concerns whether the Commission's current Rule 3902(c) fully complies with PURPA under current FERC law.

However, the remainder of the relief requested in the Motion is premature, unproven as a matter of law and fact, and not in the public interest. Critically, a finding that the Rule may not be in compliance with PURPA does not logically lead to the conclusion, as a matter of law, that the Commission should immediately set aside the ERP process in this proceeding and instead allow QFs to meet any energy and capacity need absent a competitive solicitation, and using an entirely untested new avoided cost methodology. Such a result is likely to harm ratepayers and the majority of Colorado's independent power producer ("IPP") community.

Thus, CIEA contends that the Commission should approve in part, stay in part, and deny in part the relief requested by sPower. CIEA's position is that the Commission should approve the Motion's request to investigate whether to reform Colorado's QF policies and procedures in a rulemaking to be opened after the conclusion of the Phase II process in this ERP proceeding. The Commission should stay the Motion's legal argument regarding the deficiency of the Rule pending the outcome of that rulemaking. The Commission should deny the remainder of the relief requested. CIEA's recommended decisions will allow PSCo to prosecute this pending ERP and conduct the competitive solicitation, which solicitation should be required as in the public interest,

while compelling the appropriate investigation into whether sPower's claims of violation of PURPA are founded, and if so what alternatives or amendments to the Commission's rules and QF policies may be appropriate.

II. Argument

A. PURPA REQUIRES A PUBLIC UTILITY TO PURCHASE QF POWER AT ITS AVOIDED COST.

As a threshold matter, CIEA, a non-profit trade association comprised of independent power producers that promote competition for the benefit of ratepayers, agrees with sPower that PURPA's "must-buy" obligations are the cornerstone of the law for a competitive market for resource acquisition and open access to transmission. The QF principles have worked and have created competition that in turn has lowered costs for ratepayers and improved resource diversity. A utility may not abrogate its PURPA QF obligations, and rules or policies that violate PURPA must be rejected.[1] To the extent that there is no present opportunity for a QF of up to 80 MW to contract with PSCo absent winning a competitive bidding process, CIEA agrees Colorado's QF regulations may require updating under PURPA.

The arguments raised by sPower rest on two recent FERC declaratory orders. In each of these actions, the FERC issued guidance with respect to whether state commissions' rules addressing competitive solicitations complied with PURPA. In each of these actions, the FERC declined to proceed with an enforcement action under PURPA Section 210(h). Section 210(h) of PURPA requires that an aggrieved party,

[1] *See, e.g., Grouse Creek Wind Park, LLC*, 142 FERC ¶ 61, 187 (2013) (FERC acting "within [its] authority to bring an enforcement action. . . to correct a state's misreading of the Commission's PURPA regulations and precedent").

before bringing an enforcement petition in federal district court, first petition FERC to bring its own enforcement action against the state commission.[2]

In *Hydrodynamics,*[3] the Petitioners alleged in relevant part that the Montana Public Service Commission ("MPSC") Rule which required QFs greater than 10 MW to win a competitive solicitation in order to obtain long-term avoided cost rates violated PURPA. FERC agreed. The MPSC Rule did not require regulated utilities to conduct all-source competitive solicitations, at regular intervals or at any time. FERC found that "requiring a QF to win a competitive solicitation as a condition to obtaining a long-term contract imposes an unreasonable obstacle to obtaining a legally enforceable obligation particularly where, as here, such competitive solicitations are not regularly held."[4]

The second case referenced is *Windham Solar, LLC*.[5] In that case, the Petitioners took issue in part with the Connecticut Public Utilities Regulatory Authority's requirement that QFs participate in a request for proposal as a prerequisite to obtaining a legally enforceable obligation under PURPA. FERC cited *Hydrodynamics* and wrote that it "has determined a state regulation to be inconsistent with PURPA and the Commission's PURPA regulations . . . to the extent that it offers the competitive solicitation process as the only means by which a QF . . . can obtain long-term avoided cost rates."[6] FERC concluded, "Accordingly, regardless of whether a QF has participated in a request for proposal, that QF has the right to obtain a legally enforceable obligation."[7]

[2] *Kootenai Electric Cooperative, Inc.*, 143 FERC ¶ 61,232 (2013) (noting that a declaratory order is intended to remove uncertainty for a potential district court action and is not within the "enforcement regime").
[3] *Hydrodynamics Inc. et al.*, 146 FERC ¶ 61,193 (2014).
[4] 146 F.E.R.C. ¶ 61,193 at ¶ 32.
[5] *Windham Solar, LLC and Allco Finance Limited*, 156 FERC ¶ 61,042 (2016).
[6] 156 FERC ¶ 61,042 at ¶ 5.
[7] *Id.*

Hydrodynamics and *Windham Solar, LLC* reflect an emerging trend at FERC that state commission rules permitting competitive solicitations to be the only available means for QF resources to achieve a legally enforceable obligation may violate PURPA and FERC regulations. It is important to note that these determinations have been on a case-by-case basis. sPower is correct to allege that in Colorado there is currently no rule that allows for a process whereby a QF greater than 100 kW can sell power directly to PSCo other than to win a competitive solicitation. Therefore, it is possible that there is some merit to the fundamental legal claim in the Motion.[8]

However, as discussed below, even if the question of law raised may require Commission examination, the relief requested in sPower's Motion need not, and should not, be granted by the Commission at this time such that PSCo's ERP Application is effectively dismissed.

B. FERC PRECEDENT DOES NOT MANDATE THE RELIEF REQUESTED BY THE MOTION.

Although these recent FERC cases raise the issue of whether state commission rules requiring competitive solicitations violate PURPA, it is important to note that these cases are not dispositive of whether the Commission's Rule 3902(c) – or ERP Rules 3600 to 3619 – violate PURPA. Nor do these cases require that the Commission abandon their current Rule in this proceeding or abandon the Commission's ERP rules that were not raised in the Motion.

[8] CIEA also notes that FERC has recently received comments following a technical conference on QF issues, including issues regarding QF Power Purchase Agreements ("PPAs"). *See* Docket No. AD16-16-000. Further changes and guidance to QF law are likely coming, and Colorado will need to consider each change in its obligation to implement PURPA.

PURPA directs FERC to prescribe "such rules as it determines necessary to encourage cogeneration and small power production."[9] PURPA, in turn, directs the states to "implement" FERC's regulations: "a state commission may comply with the statutory requirements by issuing regulations, by resolving disputes on a case-by-case basis, or by taking any other action reasonably designed to give effect to [the Commission's] rules."[10] FERC has held that "states are allowed a wide degree of latitude in establishing an implementation plan for section 210 of PURPA, as long as such plans are consistent with [its] regulations." In this "latitude," the determinations that a state commission makes to implement section 210 of PURPA "are by their nature fact-specific and include consideration of many factors" which FERC is "reluctant to second guess."[11]

The FERC Orders presented in the Motion relate to two of the 50 different jurisdictional approaches to PURPA implementation applied by states in their "wide degree of latitude." Each of the FERC declaratory orders was based on state-specific, and case-specific, facts. Colorado is likely to be distinguishable from each set of state-specific facts considered in the two declaratory orders.

For example, unlike the MPSC in *Hydrodynamics*, this Commission requires that competitive solicitation occur on a regular basis, *i.e.*, every four years. The decision of the Connecticut Authority in *Windham Solar, LLC* does not provide many facts concerning that state commission's rule or policy. Additionally, *Windham Solar* was decided in the context of a regional transmission organization ("RTO") market, and it is unclear how that factored into FERC's decision.

[9] 16 U.S.C. §§ 824a-3(a)-(b); *Cedar Creek Wind, LLC*, 137 FERC ¶ 61006, ¶ 27 (2011)
[10] *Cedar Creek Wind, LLC*, 137 FERC ¶ 61006 at ¶ 27.
[11] *California Public Utilities Commission*, 133 FERC ¶ 61, 059, ¶ 24 (2010).

Therefore, in its obligation to implement PURPA and in its discretion, the Commission may wish to consider in greater detail the extent to which Rule 3902(c) comports with PURPA in the Colorado-specific market given Colorado's factual circumstances and ERP rules. A rulemaking is the ideal forum for such focused consideration, on both the current Rule and on alternatives that may be preferable to implementing PURPA in light of the recent FERC precedent. sPower admits as much, arguing that "a rulemaking will be necessary to replace the current Rule 3902(c) with a PURPA-compliant rule."[12]

The alternative or interim relief sought by sPower – namely, for a waiver of the Rule in this proceeding, termination of PSCo's pending ERP process in favor of litigating an avoided cost method, and requiring PSCo to fill any resource need immediately with QF contracts or legally enforceable obligations before a Phase II solicitation – is not supported by any cite to FERC precedent, and is not supported by the decisions upon which its Motion is based. Such relief was not noticed in this proceeding nor included in PSCo's application, and such relief would upend the Colorado energy market.

As relevant to this proceeding, in each of the cases relied upon by sPower in its Motion, FERC declined to initiate an enforcement action pursuant to PURPA §210(h)(2)(A). Although the petitioners in these cases were permitted to bring an enforcement action in United States District Court relying on the FERC declaratory order as guidance, CIEA is not aware of any court decision confirming the language of FERC's declaratory orders and mandating that the state commissions adopt a different approach immediately, in the process abandoning pending applications or related rules (*i.e.,* the ERP rules). At this point, we have no idea whether and to what extent each of

[12] sPower Motion, p. 15.

Montana and Connecticut will embark on new rulemakings or other commission action, whether the matter will be negotiated or litigated, and what happens in the interim. If the FERC had decided to commence enforcement, or had issued an injunction, then urgency of the relief requested may have a legal foundation. By declining to enforce without further action, however, the FERC has implicitly allowed the states the discretion and time necessary to consider its declaration and make changes per the FERC's PURPA policy and there are no immediate steps mandated.

Further, although FERC gave some guidance to Connecticut and Montana on what rules do not comply with PURPA, it has not issued a new policy order or a notice of proposed rulemaking ("NOPR") that clearly states what is required. Accordingly, these cases effectively have left the state commissions where they found them: endeavoring to implement PURPA and FERC's regulations based on each commission's own administrative processes. When the FERC decides that it must act affirmatively to change market structures, the agency's standard practice is to issue a NOPR, sometimes accompanied by a straw proposal, consider comments nationwide, and then to enact a general order or rule. None of that has occurred here. Finally, even when the FERC does issue such a general order, it gives states sufficient lead time to conduct their own rulemakings and adopt new procedures with subsequent deadlines for utilities, sometimes years later before changes must be adopted.[13] In such instances, the FERC has recognized that practices in existence will continue until the necessary changes are scheduled to be effective.

[13] *See e.g.*, Integration of Variable Energy Resources Final Rule, RM10-11-000, FERC Order No. 764; Transmission Planning and Cost Allocation, FERC Order No. 1000. In each of these rulemakings, states and utilities were given a significant length of time to reform existing rules and policies to come into compliance with changes deemed necessary to promote competition under FERC Order 888.

Thus, although CIEA agrees that the FERC has made important statements of law in both *Hydrodynamics* and *Windham Solar* that the Commission should consider in detail as applied to Colorado's implementation of PURPA, these cases do not mandate that the Commission strike down Rule 3902(c) in this case. These cases also do not, in guidance or dicta, speak to the notion that any other action is necessary immediately. Finally, these cases do not require any state, including those subject to the declaratory orders (which Colorado is not), to cease and desist pending applications.

The Commission should undergo a rulemaking to explore the issues raised by sPower, including whether the ERP process comports with PURPA and what method should be used to calculate avoided cost for QF contracts.[14] Prior to embarking on an investigation of QF policy reformation in Colorado, or even after adopting new rules, it may even be advisable to have FERC issue its opinion as to whether Colorado's Rule is in violation of PURPA.[15] However, there is no legal support for the Commission to be obligated to dismiss or delay this ERP process pending a determination by the FERC in such a proceeding.

C. DISRUPTING PSCO'S COMPETITIVE SOLICITATION IS NOT IN THE INTERESTS OF RATEPAYERS OR INDEPENDENT POWER PRODUCERS.

Immediate waiver of Rule 3902(c), as requested by sPower, is neither mandated by PURPA or FERC, as discussed, nor is it good policy. Such a waiver would disrupt utilities' pending competitive solicitations for resources pursuant to Commission Rules 3600 to 3619 for the foreseeable future, which in turn would lead to uncertainty in the market place, would exacerbate any non-compliance with PURPA under *Hydrodynamics*,

[14] *See* sPower Motion, pp. 16-17 (proposing the "differential revenue requirements method" in lieu of competitive bidding price for long-term avoided cost).
[15] CIEA notes that seeking FERC guidance is at sPower's option or the Commission's.

and could deprive PSCo ratepayers of opportunities remaining under the Federal Production and Investment Tax Credits ("PTC" and "ITC"). Additionally, sPower's requested relief to supplant this ERP without reasoned analysis could lead to a "race to the bottom" which could harm both ratepayers and independent power producers. sPower has not met its burden to show that its requested "immediate" disruption of the ERP process, and implementation of a new untested methodology, is warranted in law or as a matter of policy.

The Motion and the relief it seeks are designed to bring a halt to the competitive solicitation that would result from a Phase I ERP decision in approximately four months.[16] sPower calls for "immediate steps to come into compliance" with PURPA's must-buy requirement "before [PSCo] acquires additional capacity in Phase II of this proceeding,"[17] It requests that the Commission require PSCo to purchase energy and capacity from QFs rather than meeting its resource needs through the ERP process.

Although some of CIEA's members could arguably stand to "win" from sPower's request, the risk of eliminating this pending ERP process at this time creates great uncertainty for IPPs such that CIEA cannot support the "immediate" relief requested. Additionally, not all IPPs are QFs, *i.e.,* facilities greater than 80 MW or non-renewable or non-cogeneration facilities. CIEA and its members recognize that competitive solicitations have created important opportunities to diversify Colorado's electric resources and to develop projects at economies of scale.

To that end, the Commission's Rule requires ERPs to be filed every 4 years. However, it is important to note here that PSCo's ERP was due to be filed in October

[16] This timeline is calculated based on hearing dates, plus one month for Commission decision.
[17] sPower Motion, pp. 13-14.

2015 and was further delayed in order to prosecute the Rush Creek application. Coupled with the ERP delay, PSCo has in the interim received approval for a large self-build wind generation project without competitive bidding. Therefore, if the Commission were to further delay the all-source solicitation as a result of the Motion, or otherwise order that a solicitation should not take place, then the Montana situation becomes more analogous to Colorado. In *Hydrodynamics,* the length of time between solicitations, and the fact that such opportunities had been erratic and had not been required by the Montana Commission were key factors in the FERC's analysis.[18]

Additionally, ratepayers will see important benefits if IPPs are able to capture the full value of the ITC and the PTC, which are scheduled to be curtailed in 2017 and 2020, respectively. The Commission should find its rules require an all-source solicitation to occur in this proceeding for PSCo.

One potential result of sPower's request to immediately fill PSCo's resource need with QF power is a "race to the bottom." Under sPower's proposal, the first QFs to request that PSCo purchase their power will be first to fill any need. It is unclear whether this approach will result in the most cost-effective or best-planned electric resources for PSCo ratepayers. For example, Utah, cited by sPower for its avoided cost methodology, requires its regulated utilities (per statute) to purchase power from QFs at the utilities' avoided cost, absent competitive bidding.[19] In a recent decision, the Utah Public Service Commission cited the "significant" cost to ratepayers of $73.3 million in payments under QF power PPAs in 2015 alone as a reason to reduce the maximum QF

[18] 146 FERC ¶ 61,193 at ¶ 32 ("requiring a QF to win a competitive solicitation as a condition to obtaining a long-term contract imposes an unreasonable obstacle to obtaining a legally enforceable obligation particularly where, as here, such competitive solicitations are not regularly held.") (emphasis added).
[19] *See* Utah Code Ann. § 54-12-2.

PPA term.[20] The Utah decision suggests that the Commission must closely assess the "competing obligations to advance the policies underlying . . . PURPA while protecting ratepayers from unreasonable costs."[21] This is the type of analysis that is performed by the Commission in a rulemaking.

Finally, the basis that sPower presents for approval of its request for the Commission to set aside PSCo's ERP and adopt a new approach implementing PURPA "immediately" is that there is "urgency" because filling PSCo's capacity and energy needs through the ERP will lower the price required to be paid to sPower by PSCo.[22] The Motion posits that a price reduction will prejudice QFs such as sPower. However, the Motion fails to consider the prejudice to IPPs and ratepayers that would result if there is no solicitation for the resource need to be filled during the resource acquisition period as required by the ERP rules. The relief requested would lead to the anomalous result where IPPs would no longer submit bids above 80 MW for 25-year terms in the solicitation as this application contemplates, but instead IPPs would submit 80 MW or lower nameplate projects based on an untested avoided cost determination on a first come, first serve basis.[23] This result could lead to higher rates for ratepayers, both in the QF PPA prices and if the restructuring caused by sPower's Motion results in IPPs or PSCo to miss out on the full ITC or PTC. sPower, like the remainder of the IPP industry,

[20] Docket No. 15-035-53, Order (Jan. 7, 2016).
[21] *Id.* at 20.
[22] Motion, pp. 2, 15. ("It is crucial that Colorado come into compliance with PURPA before Public Service fulfills its capacity needs through Phase II of this proceeding, after which Public Service's avoided capacity value will be greatly diminished.")
[23] Importantly, the Commission's rules do not rely on a bid's nameplate capacity as fulfilling the resource need. Instead, the capacity is filled based on an approved calculation of coincident peak energy delivery. For example, a 200 MW wind project may be awarded a PPA, but that PPA only receives a 12.5% capacity credit toward a resource need, or roughly 30 MW. Renewable projects are not recognized as provided a 1:1 ratio of nameplate to net capacity. This results in non-QF PPA awards that may be greater than the resource need on a nameplate basis.

is in a position to offer bids in the forthcoming solicitation. Therefore, sPower has not established that it will be prejudiced in a manner that outweighs the public interest in proceeding with the solicitation set to occur in this proceeding.

III. Conclusion

sPower argues that "[i]n the long term, the Commission should open a rulemaking proceeding to develop a PURPA-compliant rule and QF procurement program in Colorado." CIEA agrees that a rulemaking to determine whether other alternatives for electric acquisition comport better with PURPA is appropriate. However, the Motion presents no legal support for the extraordinary "immediate" relief requested to stay the ERP and implement new, untested QF methodology. The only policy reason stated for such novel relief is the concern from sPower that it may not be as profitable if a solicitation is first held. Any prejudice to sPower does not outweigh the risk of prejudice to ratepayers and the IPP community in delaying or overthrowing the instant ERP process, and sPower can participate in the bidding phase of this ERP.

For the reasons set forth above, CIEA recommends the Commission approve in part, stay in part, and deny in part the Motion, and set a notice for rulemaking to be opened at the conclusion of this ERP. The result of adopting CIEA's position will allow PSCo to prosecute this pending ERP and conduct the competitive solicitation for the benefit of ratepayers.

Respectfully submitted this 18th day of' November, 2016.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Julie A. Wolfe hereby certify that on this 18th day of November, 2016, I served a true and correct copy of *Response of the Colorado Independent Energy Association to sPower's Motion for Waiver of Commission Rule 3902(c)* in Proceeding No. 16A-0396E upon each of the persons appearing below either through the E-Filing system or by other means in accordance with applicable law.

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