BEFORE THE WASHINGTON

UTILITIES & TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION,

Complainant,

v.

PUGET SOUND ENERGY

Respondent.

DOCKETS UE-220066, UG-220067, and UG-210918 (*Consolidated*)

DAVID J. GARRETT
ON BEHALF OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
PUBLIC COUNSEL UNIT

EXHIBIT DJG-14

The Depreciation System

July 28, 2022

THE DEPRECIATION SYSTEM

A depreciation accounting system may be thought of as a dynamic system in which estimates of life and salvage are inputs to the system, and the accumulated depreciation account is a measure of the state of the system at any given time.[1] The primary objective of the depreciation system is the timely recovery of capital. The process for calculating the annual accruals is determined by the factors required to define the system. A depreciation system should be defined by four primary factors: 1) a method of allocation; 2) a procedure for applying the method of allocation to a group of property; 3) a technique for applying the depreciation rate; and 4) a model for analyzing the characteristics of vintage groups comprising a continuous property group.[2] The figure below illustrates the basic concept of a depreciation system and includes some of the available parameters.[3]

There are hundreds of potential combinations of methods, procedures, techniques, and models, but in practice, analysts use only a few combinations. Ultimately, the system selected must result in the systematic and rational allocation of capital recovery for the utility. Each of the four primary factors defining the parameters of a depreciation system is discussed further below.

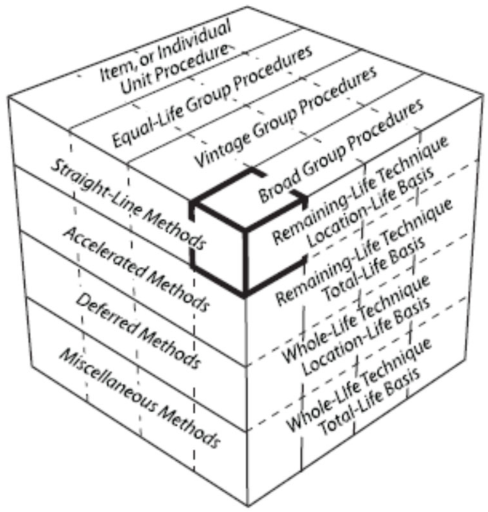
---

[1] Wolf & W. Chester Fitch, Depreciation Systems 69-70 (Iowa State University Press 1994).

[2] *Id.* at 70, 139–40.

[3] Edison Electric Institute, *Introduction to Depreciation* (inside cover) (EEI April 2013). Some definitions of the terms shown in this diagram are not consistent among depreciation practitioners and literature because depreciation analysis is a relatively small and fragmented field. This diagram simply illustrates some of the available parameters of a depreciation system.

Figure 1:
The Depreciation System Cube



1. <u>Allocation Methods</u>

The "method" refers to the pattern of depreciation in relation to the accounting periods. The method most commonly used in the regulatory context is the "straight-line method"—a type of age-life method in which the depreciable cost of plant is charged in equal amounts to each accounting period over the service life of plant.[4] Because group depreciation rates and plant balances often change, the amount of the annual accrual rarely remains the same, even when the straight-line method is employed.[5] The basic formula for the straight-line method is as follows:[6]

---

[4] National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, Public Utility Depreciation Practices 56 (NARUC 1996).

[5] *Id*.

[6] *Id*.

Equation 1:
Straight-Line Accrual

$$Annual\ Accrual = \frac{Gross\ Plant - Net\ Salavage}{Service\ Life}$$

Gross plant is a known amount from the utility's records, while both net salvage and service life must be estimated to calculate the annual accrual. The straight-line method differs from accelerated methods of recovery, such as the "sum-of-the-years-digits" method and the "declining balance" method. Accelerated methods are primarily used for tax purposes and are rarely used in the regulatory context for determining annual accruals.[7] In practice, the annual accrual is expressed as a rate which is applied to the original cost of plant to determine the annual accrual in dollars. The formula for determining the straight-line rate is as follows:[8]

Equation 2:
Straight-Line Rate

$$Depreciation\ Rate\ \% = \frac{100 - Net\ Salvage\ \%}{Service\ Life}$$

2. <u>Grouping Procedures</u>

The "procedure" refers to the way the allocation method is applied through subdividing the total property into groups.[9] While single units may be analyzed for depreciation, a group plan of depreciation is particularly adaptable to utility property. Employing a grouping procedure allows for a composite application of depreciation rates to groups of similar property, rather than conducting calculations for each unit. Whereas an individual unit of property has a single life, a group of property displays a dispersion of lives and the life characteristics of the group must be

---

[7] *Id*. at 57.

[8] *Id*. at 56.

[9] Wolf *supra* n. 1, at 74-75.

described statistically.[10] When analyzing mass property categories, it is important that each group contains homogenous units of plant that are used in the same general manner throughout the plant and operated under the same general conditions.[11]

The "average life" and "equal life" grouping procedures are the two most common. In the average life procedure, a constant annual accrual rate based on the average life of all property in the group is applied to the surviving property. While property having shorter lives than the group average will not be fully depreciated, and likewise, property having longer lives than the group average will be over-depreciated, the ultimate result is that the group will be fully depreciated by the time of the final retirement.[12] Thus, the average life procedure treats each unit as though its life is equal to the average life of the group. By contrast, the equal life procedure treats each unit in the group as though its life was known.[13] Under the equal life procedure the property is divided into subgroups that each has a common life.[14]

3. Application Techniques

The third factor of a depreciation system is the "technique" for applying the depreciation rate. There are two commonly used techniques: "whole life" and "remaining life." The whole life technique applies the depreciation rate on the estimated average service life of a group, while the remaining life technique seeks to recover undepreciated costs over the remaining life of the plant.[15]

In choosing the application technique, consideration should be given to the proper level of the accumulated depreciation account. Depreciation accrual rates are calculated using estimates

---

[10] *Id*. at 74.

[11] NARUC *supra* n. 4, at 61–62.

[12] Wolf *supra* n. 1, at 74-75.

[13] *Id*. at 75.

[14] *Id*.

[15] NARUC *supra* n. 4, at 63–64.

of service life and salvage. Periodically these estimates must be revised due to changing conditions, which cause the accumulated depreciation account to be higher or lower than necessary. Unless some corrective action is taken, the annual accruals will not equal the original cost of the plant at the time of final retirement.[16] Analysts can calculate the level of imbalance in the accumulated depreciation account by determining the "calculated accumulated depreciation," (a.k.a. "theoretical reserve" and referred to in these appendices as "CAD"). The CAD is the calculated balance that would be in the accumulated depreciation account at a point in time using <u>current</u> depreciation parameters.[17] An imbalance exists when the actual accumulated depreciation account does not equal the CAD. The choice of application technique will affect how the imbalance is dealt with.

Use of the whole life technique requires that an adjustment be made to accumulated depreciation after calculation of the CAD. The adjustment can be made in a lump sum or over a period of time. With use of the remaining life technique, however, adjustments to accumulated depreciation are amortized over the remaining life of the property and are automatically included in the annual accrual.[18] This is one reason that the remaining life technique is popular among practitioners and regulators. The basic formula for the remaining life technique is as follows:[19]

---

[16] Wolf *supra* n. 1, at 83.

[17] NARUC *supra* n. 4, at 325.

[18] NARUC *supra* n. 4, at 65 ("The desirability of using the remaining life technique is that any necessary adjustments of [accumulated depreciation] . . . are accrued automatically over the remaining life of the property. Once commenced, adjustments to the depreciation reserve, outside of those inherent in the remaining life rate would require regulatory approval.").

[19] *Id*. at 64.

Equation 3:
Remaining Life Accrual

$$Annual\ Accrual = \frac{Gross\ Plant - Accumulated\ Depreciation - Net\ Salvage}{Average\ Remaining\ Life}$$

The remaining life accrual formula is similar to the basic straight-line accrual formula above with two notable exceptions. First, the numerator has an additional factor in the remaining life formula: the accumulated depreciation. Second, the denominator is "average remaining life" instead of "average life." Essentially, the future accrual of plant (gross plant less accumulated depreciation) is allocated over the remaining life of plant. Thus, the adjustment to accumulated depreciation is "automatic" in the sense that it is built into the remaining life calculation.[20]

4. Analysis Model

The fourth parameter of a depreciation system, the "model," relates to the way of viewing the life and salvage characteristics of the vintage groups that have been combined to form a continuous property group for depreciation purposes.[21] A continuous property group is created when vintage groups are combined to form a common group. Over time, the characteristics of the property may change, but the continuous property group will continue. The two analysis models used among practitioners, the "broad group" and the "vintage group," are two ways of viewing the life and salvage characteristics of the vintage groups that have been combined to form a continuous property group.

The broad group model views the continuous property group as a collection of vintage groups that each have the same life and salvage characteristics. Thus, a single survivor curve and a single salvage schedule are chosen to describe all the vintages in the continuous property group.

[20] Wolf *supra* n. 1, at 178.

[21] *See* Wolf *supra* n. 1, at 139 (I added the term "model" to distinguish this fourth depreciation system parameter from the other three parameters).

By contrast, the vintage group model views the continuous property group as a collection of vintage groups that may have different life and salvage characteristics. Typically, there is not a significant difference between vintage group and broad group results unless vintages within the applicable property group experienced dramatically different retirement levels than anticipated in the overall estimated life for the group. For this reason, many analysts utilize the broad group procedure because it is more efficient.