## Docket No. UG-190210 - Vol. III

# Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission v. Cascade Natural Gas Corporation

November 5, 2019



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### BEFORE THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND,) DOCKET UG-190210 TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION) Complainant, ) vs. ) CASCADE NATURAL GAS ) CORPORATION, )

Respondent.

#### SETTLEMENT HEARING, VOLUME III

)

Pages 20-42

CHAIRMAN DANNER, COMMISSIONER RENDAHL, COMMISSIONER BALASBAS, JUDGE PEARSON

November 5, 2019 9:04 a.m.

Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission 621 Woodland Square Loop Southeast Lacey, Washington 98503

REPORTED BY: TAYLER GARLINGHOUSE, CCR 3358

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1 LACEY, WASHINGTON; NOVEMBER 5, 2019 9:04 A.M. 2 ------3 4 PROCEEDINGS 5 6 JUDGE PEARSON: Let's get started. Good 7 Today is Tuesday, November 5th, 2019, at 9:04 morning. 8 a.m., and we're here today for a settlement hearing in Docket UG-190210, which is captioned Washington 9 Utilities and Transportation Commission versus Cascade 10 11 Natural Gas Corporation. My name is Rayne Pearson. 12 I'm an 13 administrative law judge with the Commission, and I am 14 joined today by Chair Dave Danner, Commissioner Ann Rendahl, and Commissioner Jay Balasbas. 15 16 So let's begin by taking short form 17 appearances from the parties beginning with the Company and then we'll go around the room. 18 19 MS. PEASE: Jocelyn Pease with McDowell Rackner Gibson for Cascade Natural Gas. 20 MR. STOKES: Chad Stokes with the Cable 21 22 Huston law firm for the Alliance of Western Energy 23 Consumers. 24 Simon ffitch, Attorney, MR. FFITCH: 25 appearing on behalf of The Energy Project.

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Page 27 MS. GAFKEN: Lisa Gafken, Assistant Attorney 1 2 General, appearing on behalf of Public Counsel. 3 MR. ROBERSON: Jeff Roberson, AAG, appearing 4 on behalf of Commission Staff. 5 JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you. 6 For the record, I will ask the parties if 7 they're willing to stipulate to the admission of all of 8 the prefiled exhibits and testimony up to and including 9 the settlement testimony and exhibits. 10 MR. ROBERSON: Staff has no objection. 11 MS. GAFKEN: Public Counsel stipulates. 12 MR. FFITCH: Energy Project stipulates, Your 13 Honor. 14 MR. STOKES: AWEC has no -- no objection. 15 MS. PEASE: And Cascade stipulates to the 16 admission. 17 JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you. Then all prefiled exhibits are admitted, and I will provide a 18 19 copy of the exhibit list to the court reporter so it can 20 be made part of the record. (All prefiled exhibits admitted.) 21 22 So I understand that Mr. Roberson will be 23 making an opening statement on behalf of all parties. 24 So, Mr. Roberson, I'll turn it over to you. 25 MR. ROBERSON: Good morning, Judge Pearson,

Commissioners. Before you this morning is the
settlement, which resolves all issues in Cascade's 2019
general rate case filing. Per WAC 40-07-700, the
Commission supports the parties' informal efforts to
resolve disputes. Per WAC 480-07-740, the Commission
will approve the settlement if the terms are lawful and
in the public interest.

8 The parties before you today ask you to make a finding that the settlement before you is in the 9 public interest and its terms are lawful based on the 10 11 record before you, which as Judge Pearson just 12 mentioned, consists of the testimony submitted with Cascade's general rate case filing, the joint testimony 13 submitted in support of the settlement, which includes 14 the separate statements of every party, and the 15 16 testimony that you will hear from Mr. Parvinen, 17 Ms. Erdahl, Ms. Laycock, Mr. Collins, and Mr. Mullins, who I believe is on the phone today. 18

Before turning to the terms of the settlement, a few words about what's not in it. As Ms. Kivisto makes clear in the early part of her testimony, this is the third rate case Cascade has filed since 2015. This settlement really builds on those earlier -- the settlements that resolved those earlier rate cases wherein the Commission approved a decoupling

Page 29 mechanism, it approved a method for weather 1 2 normalization, it dealt with cost of service by requiring the Company to conduct a load study to measure 3 the usage of its core classes, it addressed rate spread 4 5 by requiring any change in Cascade's revenue requirement be spread on an equal percent of margin basis except for 6 7 special contracts. 8 Until Cascade completes that load study, the 9 Commission also addressed rate design. In essence, it froze Cascade's rates, the basic charges, until the 10 completion of that load study. It also, I think in the 11 12 last rate case, dealt with the allocation of cost between shareholders and ratepayers concerning Cascade's 13 14 validation of its distribution system. 15 There are other mechanisms that were put in 16 place outside rate cases. For example, I believe it's 17 Mr. Myhrum and Mr. Parvinen's testimony discuss the cost recovery mechanism, which allows Cascade to recover 18 fairly expeditiously its investment in making its system 19 safe. 20

All of that is not on the table in this rate case because it's already been dealt with. So really this rate case concerns largely Cascade's change of revenue requirement. Ms. Kivisto makes clear that that's basically what drove this rate case is

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changing -- changing operating expenses and investment 1 in the utility and its property for public service. 2 So with that in mind, turning to the terms 3 of the settlement. The settlement provides for a \$6.5 4 million increase to Cascade's revenue requirement. 5 Ιt 6 specifies all the elements of the rate of return, so the 7 capital structure is specified at 49.1 percent equity, 8 50.9 percent debt. Cascade's cost of debt is specified at 5.155 percent. Cascade's return on equity is 9 specified at 9.4 percent. I believe that leads to an 10 11 overall rate of return to 7.24 percent. I'm pretty sure 12 that's right, but go with whatever's written down. 13 There are other miscellaneous terms. The 14 change in revenue requirement is spread per what I just 15 discussed, which is the terms of the Commission's order 16 in the last rate case, which is equal percentage of 17 margin basis except for special contracts. And the final settlement term is that Cascade will continue to 18 comply with the conservation targets that it agreed to 19 in its -- the settlement of its 2015 rate case. 20 As mentioned before, the Commission will 21 22 approve rates when they're lawful and in the public In terms of lawfulness, the rates must be 23 interest. fair, just, reasonable, and sufficient and free of 24 25 defects such as unreasonable preference or prejudice to

certain classes of ratepayers. In terms of whether or
not rates are fair, sufficient, and in the public
interest, the Commission balances the interest of
Cascade with the interest of its ratepayers.

5 Here you should note that this is an 6 all-party settlement, which means Cascade has affirmed 7 that the settlement appropriately takes into account its 8 interest in recovering its expenses and allowing it to 9 earn a reasonable rate of return on its investment and 10 property dedicated to public service.

And Cascade's ratepayers are represented by residential ratepayers, Public Counsel's on board with the settlement, small business as well, Public Counsel. Cascade's low income customers are represented by The Energy Project, Cascade's industrial customers are represented by AWEC. The representatives from all those parties have signed onto the settlement.

From that, you can tell that it balances Cascade's customers' interest and reasonable rates for the services they receive. Commission Staff, which has no ratepayer constituency but which exist to make sure that the Commission assesses rates that are fair, just, reasonable, and sufficient, is also signatory to the settlement.

25

So with that in mind, I will turn the

Page 32 proceeding over to the witnesses for questions unless 1 2 you have questions for me. JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Any questions for 3 counsel before we bring the witnesses up? 4 So let's bring the witnesses forward 5 Okay. to this table in front, and I will swear them in and 6 7 make them available for questions from the Commissioners. Just if -- counsel, if you want to take 8 seats behind the witnesses for now. 9 10 And, Mr. Mullins, are you on the line? 11 MR. MULLINS: I am on the line. Can you 12 hear me? JUDGE PEARSON: We can hear you loud and 13 14 clear. Thank you. 15 MR. MULLINS: Great. Thank you. 16 JUDGE PEARSON: Mr. Parvinen, if you want to 17 grab that other microphone. Okay. So I will have you all please stand 18 19 and raise your right hand. 20 Mr. Mullins, that goes for you too. I will swear you all in together. 21 22 (Witness panel sworn.) JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. You may be seated. 23 Okay. So please introduce yourselves for 24 25 the record and identify who you're representing. We'll

Page 33 start with Mr. Parvinen followed by Ms. Erdahl, 1 2 Mr. Collins, and Ms. Laycock. And then, Mr. Mullins, you can go last. 3 MR. PARVINEN: Sorry about that. Playing 4 5 with the microphones. I missed the instructions. What 6 did you want me to do? 7 JUDGE PEARSON: If you could just identify 8 yourselves and who -- who you represent. 9 MR. PARVINEN: All right. Michael Parvinen, 10 representing Cascade Natural Gas. 11 Betty Erdahl, Commission Staff. MS. ERDAHL: 12 MR. COLLINS: Shawn Collins, director of The 13 Energy Project. 14 MS. LAYCOCK: Sarah Laycock with Public 15 Counsel. 16 MR. MULLINS: And Brad Mullins with the 17 Alliance of Western Energy Consumers. 18 Okay. Thank you. JUDGE PEARSON: 19 So we, at this point, will open it up to questions from the Commissioners. 20 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Okay. I quess I'll 21 22 So this question is for -- for all the parties. start. And after listening to Mr. Roberson's opening statement, 23 my concern is, while I appreciate all the parties that 24 25 have come in for an all-party settlement, and I think

that's great that you've all been able to resolve your 1 2 issues, but it is a complete black box settlement in many ways. And one of the issues that Cascade brought 3 forward in their case was the concern about being able 4 to sufficiently recover the investment and property and 5 6 reduce the lag, the regulatory lag, but we don't have 7 any idea of how much investment actually the parties 8 have agreed to. We expect the Company to come back to us with a rate case soon. 9

How do we know, while you all may know, how 10 11 do we know how much of that investment and property is 12 in rate base so that we can assess going forward, if there is no settlement in the future, where we are, 13 what's our baseline? And so that's just a question I 14 have for you. I know you can't reveal what's -- what's 15 16 in the settle- -- what you settled, but just to note 17 that it's an issue. So how do we deal with that going forward? 18

MR. PARVINEN: This is Mike Parvinen. I guess I -- I'll -- I'll start off with one of the things that -- one of the agreed upon items in the settlement is that -- that -- that we're really not authorizing any sort of rate base in this proceeding. So typically when you have a rate case, one of the things you do is authorize a level of -- of rate base where you start

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Page 35 with what was approved from the previous rate case and 1 2 then examine everything that was added since that --3 since that time. 4 Part of this settlement included actually not authorizing -- not authorizing anything for rate 5 6 So when we go into our next rate case, we'll base. 7 actually be going back to the rate base from the previous case. So no rate base is considered either in 8 or out from what we had -- had filed. So it makes our 9 jobs a little bit more expanded for the next rate case. 10 11 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you. That helps, but I'm curious to hear if anybody has a 12 13 different story. 14 MS. ERDAHL: This is Betty Erdahl from 15 Staff. I would echo Mike Parvinen's comments, but also 16 add we included language and agreed that we would look at prudence and take a look at the plan that's put in 17 rate base investment in the next rate case. So we're 18 leaving the door open so that we can see if we believe 19 that that's reasonable and audit it in the next rate 20 And there's many ways to get to a level of 21 case. 22 planned and get to the 6.5 million, so we truly differ in that respect, but just agree to the revenue 23 24 requirement of 6.5 million. 25 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: Thank you.

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Anybody has anything to add, go forward, 1 2 otherwise my colleagues have a question. CHAIRMAN DANNER: All right. Thank you. 3 Good morning. My question is for Mr. Parvinen. 4 In Ms. Kivisto's testimony, in her direct testimony on page 5 7, she mentioned that -- the question was, does the 6 7 Company believe the regulatory outcomes from Washington 8 influence the recent downgrade of the Company stock. 9 And in there, she quoted Fitch as saying that the Company has a challenging regulatory environment. 10 And 11 of course since we're the regulators, we're concerned 12 about a statement like that if we have a challenging 13 regulatory environment.

14 I actually looked at the Fitch report. First, I would note that because our last rate case 15 16 settled, this rate case is a proposal to settle, the 17 MAOP penalty was settled, how do you know what the challenging regulatory environment is and is it --18 19 should we be approving settlements or should we actually mitigate a case so that you can find out what the 20 regulatory environment really is? I mean, is Fitch --21 22 is Fitch concerned about cases settling or is there another issue that they have with the regulatory 23 24 environment in Washington? 25 MR. PARVINEN: That's a tough question.

Yeah, it's -- it's hard to -- it's hard to gauge how 1 2 Fitch views the regulatory regime. Yes, I would agree that, with being the settlement is particularly the 3 black box settlements, that -- that that does make it --4 make things a little more -- more difficult when all the 5 parties agree that the -- that the outcomes are fair, 6 7 just, reasonable, and sufficient. 8 I think particularly concerning on the last rate case in particular was -- was it -- it became more 9 of a convoluted rate case because of tax reform too and 10 how that impacted the final outcome. So the final 11 12 outcome looks substantially different than what was -was originally filed, tax reform in the middle so... 13 14 CHAIRMAN DANNER: But the tax -- I mean, the tax issue, though, is not present in this case. And so 15 the fact that this is included in the testimony in this 16 case, I'm trying to figure out what the link to this 17 case is. I mean, there's a challenging regulatory 18 environment, take the taxes aside, I assume there's 19 still -- because this is in the testimony, there's still 20 a challenging regulatory environment. I noticed that 21 they talked about the 94 being low average with the ROE, 22 but, again, that was settled. 23 24 So I mean, if -- if there's challenging

25 regulatory environment here, I want to figure out what

1	there is that you know, what are we addressing here?
2	MR. PARVINEN: Yeah, it it it
3	is difficult. I would say that one of our perspectives
4	in in settling is is is as a settling party, we
5	take into account what we think a litigated outcome
6	would be as one of the as one of the conditions on
7	on taking into account when we come up with a with a
8	settlement offer or settlement proposal and accepting
9	the settlement is is weigh that against what we think
10	the possible outcomes will be.
11	So it's I would say that I guess it's
12	true that we take into account, for example, the 944
13	that we've settled on. We we think that's in the
14	ballpark of what the Commission is likely to come out
15	with. It's it's our assumption that that's that
16	that's a reasonable outcome without right, but
17	without having that without having that that
18	that that hearing, is that true is that true or
19	not.
20	CHAIRMAN DANNER: Yeah, I think that's my
21	point. I mean, there's a downgrade in your financial
22	rating from a particular agency. I mean, it's still a
23	healthy investment grade, but it's if if it's due
24	to actions that this Commission has taken, if it's
25	speculation about what this Commission may or may not

Page 39 do, I mean, there's really only one way to prove that, 1 2 and that's not to settle the cases. And so, you know, I just want to make sure 3 what my marching orders here are, because I think you're 4 asking us to settle this case. 5 6 MR. PARVINEN: We are. CHAIRMAN DANNER: All right. Thank you. 7 8 COMMISSIONER BALASBAS: All right. This 9 question is to all the parties as -- as relates to the provision in the settlement regarding the conservation 10 11 targets. And in the settlement, it states that the 12 terms from the settlement in Docket UG-152286 regarding conservation targets shall remain in effect. 13 14 So this is really a clarifying question, and does that mean that all of Section E from that docket 15 16 would remain in effect under the terms of this 17 settlement? And whoever wants to take that first, go 18 ahead. 19 I'm trying to -- this is Mike MR. PARVINEN: I'm trying to recall what Section E actually 20 Parvinen. I don't have a copy of the order in front of me. 21 said. 22 I will say that the settlement in that docket had a number of conditions regarding conservation, and that 23 every other condition is already in -- permanently in 24 25 place either through other orders or other procedures so

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that -- that there was no need to act on those. I think 1 2 the following settlement even -- even in the -- the -the following settlement in '17, is it '17 docket? 3 Had an exhibit that identified each of the conservation 4 things that we're currently doing as far as the 5 6 reporting, the plans, and things like that. 7 So it solidified -- it solidified through 8 order all of those components so that those -- yeah, so 9 that they're all in -- they're all in place. So I quess you could say that in total, yes, it's basically keeping 10 that intact, if that makes sense. 11 12 MS. ERDAHL: And I would agree. I think 13 what was proposed in this case was to deviate from one 14 aspect, and that's what we agreed not to deviate from the meeting of hundred percent of the target in the 15 16 conservation plan. 17 I would agree with that as MS. LAYCOCK: well. I believe the rest of them would be carried 18 19 through. MR. MULLINS: And this is Brad. I would 20 21 have the same response. 22 COMMISSIONER RENDAHL: So all of them 23 including the meeting a hundred percent of the target? 24 I see nodding of head from Ms. Laycock. 25 MS. LAYCOCK: Yes.

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Page 41 JUDGE PEARSON: Do we have any additional 1 2 questions? 3 Okay. Thank you to the panel of witnesses. We appreciate you being here giving testimony. 4 Is there anything further that we need to 5 address? Okay. Hearing nothing, that concludes the 6 7 settlement hearing today, and we will adjourn and be off 8 the record. 9 Or do you have something? 10 MS. GAFKEN: I have one thing. 11 JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. 12 MS. GAFKEN: It's a very simple thing. The 13 public comment exhibit. 14 JUDGE PEARSON: Yes. 15 MS. GAFKEN: I wanted to ask for a due date, 16 and as per our usual request, I would ask for a week. 17 So I think that puts us at November 12th. 18 That sounds great. JUDGE PEARSON: 19 MS. GAFKEN: Okay. Thank you. 20 JUDGE PEARSON: Okay. Thank you. Okay. If there's nothing else, we will 21 22 adjourn and be off the record. Thank you all. 23 (Adjourned at 9:25 a.m.) 24 25

	Page	42
1	CERTIFICATE	
2		
3	STATE OF WASHINGTON	
4	COUNTY OF THURSTON	
5		
6	I, Tayler Garlinghouse, a Certified Shorthand	
7	Reporter in and for the State of Washington, do hereby	
8	certify that the foregoing transcript is true and	
9	accurate to the best of my knowledge, skill and ability.	
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