

BEFORE THE WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

In the Matter of the Petition of

Cascade Natural Gas Corporation

For an Order Authorizing A Waiver of the
Requirement of the WEAFF Program Annual
Tariff Revision

Docket No. UG-200__

PETITION OF CASCADE NATURAL GAS
CORPORATION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Cascade Natural Gas Corporation (“Cascade”) files with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (“Commission”) this petition requesting an Order to temporarily waive the annual true-up requirement of its Washington Energy Assistance Fund Program (“WEAF”).

2. Cascade is a utility that provides service to approximately 222,300 customers in various locations in Washington including Bellingham, Mt. Vernon, Bremerton, Longview, Yakima, Kennewick, and Walla Walla.

II. AUTHORITY FOR PETITION

3. This petition is submitted in accordance with RCW 80.01.040, RCW 80.28.020, and WAC 480-07-370.

III. COMMUNICATIONS

4. In accordance with WAC 480-07-395, required names and addresses of Petitioners are shown below. Please direct all communications regarding this petition to the following:

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and

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IV. SUMMARY OF PETITION

5. Cascade requests the annual true-up of its WEAFF rates, as required in Order No. 04 of Docket UG-152286, be waived for the 2020-2021 program year. The primary reason for the petition is the general uncertainty in WEAFF funding and customer bill assistance demands in the 2020-2021 program year due to the pandemic.

V. BACKGROUND

6. On February 14, 2006, Cascade filed a general rate case docketed as UG-060256. As part of the settlement agreement to this rate case, Cascade began utilizing the network of Community Action Agencies as specified by the Washington State Department of Commerce

(formally the Washington Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development) to distribute to qualified Cascade customers Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (“LIHEAP”) funds and its own WEAF Funds.¹

7. On December 1, 2015, Cascade filed a general rate case docketed as UG-152286. Order No. 04 and the Joint Settlement Agreement in the docket required Cascade to thenceforth file an annual “true-up revision” of its WEAF cost recovery tariff.²

8. Cascade has met its annual WEAF true-up filing requirement by revising the WEAF cost recovery tariff to meet the required budget collection and program soft-cap budget levels as required in Order No. 05 UG-152286.³

9. On April 16, 2020, Cascade filed revisions to its WEAF tariff to provide for temporary billing assistance related to the economic hardships brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In doing so, Cascade created the Hardship Economic Assistance Receivable Temporary (“HEART”) grant, which provides a one-time benefit for customers experiencing financial hardship due to the current status of economic uncertainty. The Commission allowed the revisions with Less than Statutory Notice becoming effective April 24, 2020.⁴

10. On August 31, 2020, in response to the ongoing economic uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and provide additional help through the upcoming 2020-2021 heating season, Cascade filed a tariff revision to extend the HEART Grant provisions until March 31, 2021. The revisions also clarify and ease criteria for qualifying for assistance under the program.⁵

¹ UG-060256, Paragraph 14, Page 9 of Joint Settlement Agreement.

² UG-152286, Order 04 at Paragraph 21, page 8. Annual true-up pertains to Cascade’s tariff “WASHINGTON ENERGY ASSISTANCE FUND (WEAF) PROGRAM COST RECOVERY SCHEDULE 593”.

³ UG-152286, Order 05.

⁴ UG-200355, Order 01.

⁵ UG-200769

11. Since April 2020, Cascade notes that customer pledges for bill assistance under the WEAF program have increased on average 1.5 times over the previous program year and Cascade anticipates this rate of elevated bill assistance will likely continue through the upcoming 2020-2021 heating season.

12. Currently, Cascade's WEAF rate true-up calculation shows the rate would be decreased for the 2020-2021 program year, despite increased budget levels. Cascade believes this outcome could result in a meaningful decrease in available WEAF funds during a critical and uncertain time for customers in need of assistance.

VI. REQUESTED ORDER

13. Cascade respectfully requests that the Commission issue an order, on or before November 1, 2020, providing a waiver to the annual "true-up revision" for the WEAF tariff for the 2020-2021 program year.

DATED this 30th day of September 2020.

/s/ Michael Parvinen
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NOTICE OF FILING