



LEGISLATIVE CONSUMER COMMITTEE

SENATE MEMBERS

Brad Molnar
Andrea Olsen, Vice Chair
Daniel Zolnikov

HOUSE MEMBERS

Brad Barker, Chair
George Nikolakakos
Zoey Zephyr

Extract
MINUTES LOG
March 19, 2024
State Capitol, Room 172
Zoom Videoconference

Please note: This document is a Minutes Log and provides annotation of the time elapsed between the beginning of the meeting and the time at which the item was presented or discussed, a motion was made, or a vote was taken. The narrative presented here is provided only as a guide to the audio or video recording of the meeting. The official discussion, motion, or vote is available on the audio or video archive of this meeting. The Legislature does not prepare a transcript of the meeting activities. The time designation may be used to locate the referenced discussion on the audio or video recording of this meeting.

Access to an electronic copy of these minutes and the audio or video recording is provided from the Legislative Branch home page at <http://legmt.gov>. On the left-side menu of the home page, select Committees, then Interim. Once on the page for Interim Committees, scroll down to the appropriate committee. The written Minutes Log, along with the audio and video recordings, is listed by meeting date on the interim committee's web page. Each of the "Exhibits" is linked and can be viewed by clicking on the Exhibit of interest. All Exhibits are public information and may be printed.

Please contact the Montana Consumer Counsel at 406-444-2771 for more information.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Brad Molnar
Senator Andrea Olsen
Representative Brad Barker
Representative George Nikolakakos
Representative Zoey Zephyr

COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED

Senator Zolnikov

MONTANA CONSUMER COUNSEL STAFF PRESENT

Jason Brown, Consumer Counsel
Paul Schulz, Rate Analyst
Suzanne Snow, Secretary
Jaime Stamatson, Economist

AGENDA

[\(Attachment 1\)](#)

CALL TO ORDER

10:02:00 Chair Barker called the meeting to order with roll call.

[\(Attachment 2\)](#)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – October 30, 2023

10:03:30 MOTION: Senator Molnar moved acceptance of the minutes.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously on a voice vote.

[\(Attachment 3 – October 30, 2023\)](#)

NORTHWESTERN ENERGY PRESENTATION ON JANUARY 2024 COLD WEATHER EVENT

10:04:06 Jason Brown introduced John Hines, Vice President – Supply/Montana Government Affairs, to present Northwestern’s presentation on the January 2024 Cold Weather Event. [\(Attachment 4\)](#)

10:28:35 Committee Discussion:

REGIONAL HYDROPOWER AND THE COLUMBIA BASIN RESTORATION INITIATIVE

10:48:22 Jason Brown gave a brief background on the Regional Hydropower and the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative and introduced Jaime Stamatson, Staff Economist, to provide the committee with a summary of the hydro power in the region. [\(Attachment 5\)](#)

11:12:24 Committee Discussion:

STATUS OF CASES PENDING

- 11:19:55 Jason Brown highlighted the cases that have seen change in status since the Committee's last meeting. ([Attachment 6](#))
- 11:20:22 NWE Gas Tracker, Docket [2022.07.077](#).
- Committee Discussion:
- 11:37:38 Chair Barker ask Jason Brown to clarify that he was talking about price hedging and not physically hedging.
- 11:40:15 Chair Barker asked if the Consumer Counsel had any issues with NorthWestern's physical hedging strategy.
- 11:32:15 NWE Gas Tracker, Docket [2023.07.068](#)
- 11:32:31 NWE Application to Increase Retail Electric and Natural Gas Utility Service Rates, Docket [2022.07.078](#), filed 8/8/22.
- 11:58:22 Chair Barker asked what the PCCAM reset rate is currently.
- 12:01:00 Havre Pipeline Co. Annual Tracker Application, Docket [2023.08.070](#), filed 7/31/23.
- 12:01:15 NWE QF-1 Tariff Update Application, Docket [2023.08.076](#), filed 8/24/23.
- 12:01:55 NWE Annual PCCAM Application, Docket [2023.09.081](#), filed 9/1/23.
- 12:03:50 NWE Property Tax Tracker, Docket [2023.12.100](#), filed 12-15-23.
- 12:06:09 Joint Petition of NWE and Town of Philipsburg Requesting Approval for NWE to Provide Electricity Supply Service, Docket [2024.02.025](#) – filed 2/20/24.
- 12:08:47 MDU Electric Tracker (Rate 58), Docket [2023.06.055](#).
- 12:12:12 MDU Gas Tracker Filings (Rate 88), Docket [2023.09.084](#), filed 9/8/23.
- 12:12:39 MDU Application to Offer Incentives for Conversion in the Saco/Bowdoin Area, Docket [2021.09.116](#), filed 9/15/21.
- Committee Discussion:
- 12:15:46 Chair Barker asked if there was a way to convert those lines from gas collection to distribution.
- 12:17:03 Chair Barker asked if MDU could do something as simple as dropping a propane tank at the well and connecting it to a more simplified distribution.
- 12:18:25 MDU Annual Avoided Cost Update (Rate 93), Docket [2023.10.090](#), filed 10/12/23.

- 12:19:15 MDU Property Tax Tracker, Docket [2023.10.089](#), filed 11/17/23.
- 12:19:29 EWM Annual Gas Cost Tracker, Docket [2023.04.029](#), filed 6/1/22.
- 12:19:40 EWM Annual Gas Cost Tracker, Docket [2023.06.048](#), filed 6/1/23.
- 12:19:56 EWM Application for Approval of Gas Cost Hedging for West Yellowstone, Docket [2023.06.057](#), filed 6/29/23.

Committee Discussion:

- 12:21:19 Chair Barker stated it would be interesting to understand what the utility's methodology is for physical hedging.
- 12:25:22 EWM Application for Waiver of Certain Ring-Fencing Requirements and Authorization of a Special Dividend, Docket [2023.10.091](#), filed 10/17/23.
- 12:26:24 EWM Property Tax Tracker, Docket [2023.11.097](#), filed 11/30/23.
- 12:26:47 Qwest Corporation d/b/a CenturyLink QC Petition for Temporary Waiver, filed 12/9/21, and Commission Investigation into the Adequacy of Legacy Infrastructure Operated by CenturyLink, Docket [2021.12.136](#).

Committee Discussion:

- 12:28:33 Chair Barker asked if the utility is also counting the number of customers who have just left the service due to service quality issues in addition to the trouble tickets.
- 12:33:21 Aquanet-Linlee Lake Estates' Application to Implement Rates and Charges for Service in Billings, MT, Docket [2023.08.079](#), filed 8/30/23.
- 12:37:33 MEIC et al. Petition for Rulemaking, Docket [2024.03.028](#), filed 3/1/24
- 12:39:10 CBC [Third] Petition to Set Terms and Conditions, Docket [2021.12.134](#), filed 12/1/21.
CBC [Third] *Petition for Judicial Review*, First Judicial District Cause No. BDV-2022-764, filed 11/30/22.
CBC Appeal to Montana Supreme Court, Case No. DA 23-0529, filed 9/15/23.
- 12:41:35 NWE Petition for LEO Rulemaking, Docket [2024.01.011](#), filed 1/4/24.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- 12:44:03 No public comment was offered at this time.

FINANCIAL REPORT

12:44:33 Jason Brown reviewed the budget versus expenditure report that reflected accounting periods 1 through 8 of fiscal year 2024 (July 2023 through February 2024).

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ITEMS NOT LISTED ON THE AGENDA

12:45:34 No public comment was offered at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

12:46:16 There being no other matters before the Committee the Chair adjourned the meeting.