

22-00154-UT | NOTICE OF INQUIRY

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 1 attachments (219 KB)

22-00154-UT - Notice of Inquiry.pdf;

BEFORE THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY INTO ELECTRIC)	
PUBLIC UTILITIES' VEGETATION MANAGEMENT)	Case No. 22-00154-UT
<u>PLANS AND PROCEDURES</u>)	

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BEFORE THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

**IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY INTO ELECTRIC)
PUBLIC UTILITIES' VEGETATION MANAGEMENT) Case No. 22-00154-UT
PLANS AND PROCEDURES)**

NOTICE OF INQUIRY

THIS MATTER comes before the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission (the “Commission”) upon its own motion.

Whereupon, being duly informed,

THE COMMISSION FINDS AND CONCLUDES:

1. The Commission is aware of the severity and early onset of New Mexico’s 2022 wildfire season and its causes of exacerbated prolonged drought in the Southwest and persistent strong winds, associated with climate change. Specifically, the first reported wildfire of the 2022 season, the MM 38 Fire in Mora County, affecting 1,705 acres, occurred on the historically early date of February 23, 2022. Since then, there have been 19 more wildfires, three in March, affecting 26,348 acres, eleven in April, affecting 469,937 acres, and five in May, affecting 339,244 acres.
2. Notably, one of the fires, the Highway 380 Fire in Lea County, which affected 17,658 acres, was suspected of being started by power lines. The Commission is aware of the increasing risk of wildfire from sparking power lines when high winds cause trees to fall onto power lines which spark onto dry vegetation, and the resultant need for appropriate vegetation management by utility companies in New Mexico. The Commission finds that the current proliferation of wildfires in New Mexico affects the provision of safe, reliable electric service to New Mexicans and in the future could have a devastating impact on safe, reliable electric all customers of New Mexico electric public utilities.

3. Further, the Commission is aware that utilities and co-ops in New Mexico have vegetation management plans and that the Commission has, in 2013, attempted to formulate best practices for vegetation management through a Wildfire Task Force. The Commission also acknowledges that it has received copies of some utilities' vegetation management plans in the past in other dockets. However, the Commission is concerned that current vegetation management plans and other wildfire protection practices may not be sufficiently protective against wildfires given the current challenging weather and climate conditions in New Mexico.

4. The Commission is authorized to require information regarding reliability of electric power within the State of New Mexico pursuant to Section 62-6-25, NMSA 1978, which states that: "A. The commission may require electric utilities and rural electric cooperatives to furnish the commission with available information material to the reliability of electrical power grids within the state." Therefore, the Commission seeks to commence an Inquiry proceeding to collect in one docket all New Mexico electric public utility and rural electric co-operative vegetation management plans and other wildfire protection practices, for the purpose of reviewing the assumptions, methods, and standards underpinning these plans, to identify best practices under the increasingly severe weather and climate conditions presently occurring, and to obtain recommendations for best practices in wildfire management in the urban/wildland interface and in forested areas throughout the State of New Mexico.

5. Whereupon, the Commission finds that it should issue this Notice of Inquiry.

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED:

A. All investor-owned electric utilities and rural electric cooperative organizations shall provide the Commission:

a. a copy of their current vegetation management plan; and

b. a copy of any other wildfire protection practices engaged in by the utility.

B. **THE RESPONSE TO THIS NOTICE OF INQUIRY** shall be filed in this docket no later than **close of business on July 6, 2022.**

C. One or more workshops may be held by the Commission for purposes of discussing existing and proposed vegetation management and other practices that may provide protection from wildfires under current weather and climate conditions to be scheduled by single signature order of the Commission.

D. Copies of this Order shall be e-mailed to all persons on the attached Certificate of Service if their e-mail addresses are known, and otherwise shall be sent via regular mail.

ISSUED under the Seal of the Commission at Santa Fe, New Mexico this 15th day of
June, 2022.

NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

/s/ Cynthia B. Hall, electronically signed

CYNTHIA B. HALL, COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 1

/s/ Jefferson L. Byrd, electronically signed

JEFFERSON L. BYRD, COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 2

/s/ Joseph M. Maestas, electronically signed

JOSEPH M. MAESTAS, COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 3

/s/ Theresa Becenti-Aguilar, electronically signed

THERESA BECENTI-AGUILAR, COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 4

/s/ Stephen Fischmann, electronically signed

STEPHEN FISCHMANN, COMMISSIONER, DISTRICT 5



BEFORE THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

**IN THE MATTER OF AN INQUIRY INTO ELECTRIC)
PUBLIC UTILITIES' VEGETATION MANAGEMENT) Case No. 22-00154-UT
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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I **CERTIFY** that on this date I sent, via email only, a true and correct copy of the **Notice of Inquiry** to the electric companies' contacts listed below.

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DATED this 16th of June 2022.

NEW MEXICO PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

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