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October 22, 2009

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING AND FIRST CLASS MAIL

PUC Filing Center
Public Utility Commission of Oregon
PO Box 2148
Salem, OR 97308-2148

Re: Docket UG 152 and 163

Attached for filing in the above dockets are an original and five copies of the Supplemental Stipulation and Joint Brief in Support of Supplemental Stipulation. A copy of this filing has been served on the parties to the UG 152 and UG 163 service list as indicated on the attached certificate of service.

Very truly yours,

Wendy McIndo

Enclosure

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that I have this day served the foregoing document in OPUC Docket Nos. UG 152 and UG 163 by electronic mail and first class mail to the following parties or attorneys of parties:

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BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION 1 OF OREGON 2 UG 152/UG 163 3 4 In the Matters of 5 NORTHWEST NATURAL GAS COMPANY JOINT BRIEF IN SUPPORT OF 6 Application for a General Rate Revision SUPPLEMENTAL STIPULATION Advice No. 02-19, (UG 152) 7 and 8 Petition to Commence Investigation. (UG 163) 9 10 11 Pursuant to OAR 860-014-0085(4), Northwest Natural Gas Company ("NW Natural" or 12 the "Company"), Staff of the Public Utility Commission of Oregon ("Staff"), the Citizens' Utility 13 Board of Oregon ("CUB"), and Northwest Industrial Gas Users ("NWIGU") (together, the 14 "Parties") file this brief in support of their Supplemental Stipulation dated October 21, 2009, 15 regarding the amortization of deferred capital costs associated with the Company's Automatic 16 Meter Reading ("AMR") project. The Parties intend this Supplemental Stipulation to 17 supplement the stipulation adopted by the Public Utility Commission of Oregon 18 ("Commission") in this docket in Order No. 07-426 ("Stipulation"). 19 I. BACKGROUND 20 On September 26, 2007, the Public Utility Commission of Oregon ("Commission") 21 approved the Stipulation extending the terms of NW Natural's Weather Adjusted Rate 22 Mechanism ("WARM") and Distribution Margin Normalization ("DMN") mechanisms. As a key 23 provision of that Stipulation, NW Natural agreed that the Company would not initiate a general 24 ¹ The Parties contacted the other parties to the Stipulation adopted by the Commission in Order No. 07-426. The Oregon Department of Energy, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Northwest 25 Energy Coalition do not object to the Supplemental Stipulation. The Parties were unable to contact representatives from the Oregon Energy Coordinators Association and the Community Action 26 Partnership of Oregon.

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1 rate case prior to September 1, 2011 (the "Rate Case Moratorium") except under certain conditions. Among the agreed-upon exceptions is the following:

If Portland General Electric receives approval of its automated metering infrastructure tariff (Docket UE 189) or otherwise notifies NW Natural that it is terminating the agreement governing the PGE and NW Natural joint meter reading territory, NW Natural intends to implement its automated meter reading ("AMR") in the territory currently covered by the JMR agreement. If the Parties do not support a request by NW Natural for the opportunity to recover the capital costs for its AMR project on an annual basis and the Parties cannot agree on an alternative form of recovery, or the Commission does not approve recovery of prudent costs pursuant to NW Natural's request, NW Natural may file a general rate case.²

The "JMR agreement" ("JMR Agreement") referenced is the contract between NW Natural and Portland General Electric ("PGE"), entered into in May of 2001. In that contract Northwest Natural and PGE agreed to divide between them the meter reading routes in their overlapping territories in the Portland and Salem areas, and to read each other's meters on their respective assigned routes. At the time the Parties signed the Stipulation, PGE had requested that the Commission approve an automated metering infrastructure tariff, which, if approved would render the JMR Agreement obsolete. The Parties were informed that NW Natural had already begun deployment of its own automated meter reading project in non-JMR territory (the Company's "Phase I AMR Project") and that if the JMR Agreement were to be dissolved, NW Natural would likely extend the AMR project to cover the JMR territory (the Company's "Phase II AMR Project"). The Stipulation states that, in this event, NW Natural should be allowed an opportunity to recover its prudently incurred capital costs for its AMR project, either through a rate case or an alternative mechanism.

On May 5, 2008, the Commission approved PGE's proposed tariff to recover AMR costs. Two days later, PGE served NW Natural with formal notice of its intent to terminate the

² Order No. 07-426, Appendix A, at pp. 2-3.

³ See, Reference to Request to Add Schedule 111, Advanced Metering Infrastructure ("AMI"), UE 189.

JMR Agreement. NW Natural's current schedule for deployment of the Phase II AMR Project anticipates that Phase II will be complete in December 2009. The total capital cost for the Phase II AMR Project is estimated to be approximately \$30 million.

On January 14, 2009, the Company filed a petition requesting authorization to defer the revenue requirement related to the installation of the Phase II AMR Project. The purpose of the petition was to allow NW Natural an opportunity to recover its net costs of service associated with the Phase II AMR Project until those costs could be reflected in permanent rates. In its Order No. 09-105, issued in UM 1413, the Commission adopted Staff's recommendation and approved NW Natural's deferral petition. The Supplemental Stipulation relates to the amortization phase of the Phase II AMR Project deferrals.

II. DISCUSSION

A. The Supplemental Stipulation Establishes Standards to be Applied to the Commission's Evaluation of NW Natural's Requests for Amortization of Deferred Phase II AMR Project Costs.

The Supplemental Stipulation establishes the Parties' agreement as to future requests by NW Natural to renew its Phase II AMR deferral application, and the standards that should be applied to NW Natural's requests for amortization of the deferred revenue requirement associated with the prudently incurred capital costs for its Phase II AMR Project. NW Natural plans to file annual requests for the renewal of its authority to defer its revenue requirement associated with its Phase II AMR Project until such costs are included in permanent rates.⁴

First, the Parties agree to support renewal of the Phase II AMR Project deferral applications each year until the effective date of rates set in NW Natural's next general rate case.⁵

Second, the Supplemental Stipulation states that the Parties agree to support the amortization of all of NW Natural's prudently incurred Phase II AMR Project cost deferrals

 $^{^4}$ Supplemental Stipulation at \P 2.

^{26 &}lt;sup>5</sup> *Id.*

subject to the conditions described in the Supplemental Stipulation.⁶ The Supplemental Stipulation provides that NW Natural will seek amortization of Phase II AMR Project deferred amounts concomitantly with the Company's annual purchased gas adjustment ("PGA") Filings.⁷ The Parties agree that prior to amortization, the deferred costs will be subject to

audit and an earnings review conducted in a manner consistent with ORS 757.259.8

Third, the Supplemental Stipulation also describes the earnings review periods and deferral periods relevant to NW Natural's 2010 request for amortization and subsequent requests for amortization,⁹ and further describes the earnings test the Parties agree should be applied prior to approving amortization of Phase II AMR Project deferred amounts.¹⁰ The Parties agree that NW Natural should be allowed to amortize the deferral costs except to the extent that recovery would cause the Company's return on equity ("ROE") during the relevant earnings review period to exceed the Company's authorized ROE in effect during the earnings review period.¹¹

Fourth, the Supplemental Stipulation provides that the shareholders' portion of WACOG variances deferred pursuant to NW Natural's PGA will be excluded from the earnings test. To the extent that the Commission believes that this provision conflicts with the Commission precedent and policy on this issue, including Order No. 08-504, the NW Natural requests an exception from Commission policy for purposes of the Supplemental Stipulation. NW Natural makes this request because when the Company agreed to the Rate Case Moratorium, it excluded WACOG from its earnings tests. This treatment of WACOG served

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6 Id. at ¶ 3.
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7 Id. at ¶ 6.
8 Id. at ¶¶ 1, 4.
9 Id. at ¶ 6.
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^{25 &}lt;sup>10</sup> *Id.* at ¶¶ 4, 5. ¹¹ *Id.* at ¶ 4.

^{26 &}lt;sup>12</sup> *Id.*

as a basis for NW Natural's decision to enter into the Stipulation that included the Rate Case Moratorium. The other Parties support this request.

Fifth, the Supplemental Stipulation addresses the fact that during the amortization periods of Phase II AMR Project cost deferrals, the Company may be amortizing the customer share of excess gas costs deferred pursuant to its PGA.¹³ The Parties agree that for purposes of applying the amortization cap contained in ORS 757.259(6), the Company should be allowed to amortize the full amount (after the effects of any earnings review) of Phase II AMR Project cost deferral each calendar year, unless the amortization of all deferrals subject to ORS 757.259(6), excluding natural gas and pipeline commodity costs specified in ORS 757.259(7), would result in a surcharge in excess of three percent of the Company's gross revenues for the preceding calendar year.¹⁴ The Parties agree that any amounts not allowed to be amortized in any given year as a result of applying ORS 757.259(6) should be amortized in a subsequent period.¹⁵

Finally, the Supplemental Stipulation provides that amounts amortized pursuant to the Supplemental Stipulation will be spread an equal percentage of margin basis for customer classes participating in the AMR project—those customers taking sales service under Schedules 1, 2, 3, and 31.¹⁶ The purpose of this provision is to amortize the deferred costs only among customers who will directly benefit from the AMR project. Customers under other schedules provide their own meters or already have automatic meter reading equipment installed, and will therefore not directly benefit from the AMR project.

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24 <sup>13</sup> Id. at ¶ 5.
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^{25 &}lt;sup>14</sup> ld.

¹⁵ Id.

^{26 &}lt;sup>16</sup> *Id.* at ¶ 7.

B. The Commission Should Adopt the Supplemental Stipulation, as It Is Consistent with Law and Commission Policy.

The Supplemental Stipulation is consistent with law and Commission policy and should therefore be adopted by the Commission. *First,* acceptance of the Supplemental Stipulation will allow the Rate Case Moratorium to remain in place. In UG 152 and UG 163, NW Natural agreed to the Rate Case Moratorium in exchange for an extension of its WARM and DMN mechanisms. However, as discussed above, the Rate Case Moratorium is subject to several exceptions. In the event that the Parties do not support an opportunity for NW Natural to recover the capital costs for its AMR Project or in the event the Commission does not approve recovery of prudently incurred costs of the AMR Project, NW Natural will be free to file a general rate case. Thus, approval of the Supplemental Stipulation will maintain the Rate Case Moratorium, which in turn will save the Commission and Parties the time and expense that would be required to litigate a NW Natural general rate case.

Second, the Supplemental Stipulation is consistent with the Commission's policy in favor of adopting stipulations that provide guidance to the parties and reduce unnecessary litigation. See U.S. West Communications, Inc., Docket UM 753, Order No. 96-179 (July 16, 1996) (adopting a stipulation because it provided standards that "should provide guidance for [the utility] in the future and reduce unnecessary litigation."). The Parties' agreement on the standards to be applied to amortization of AMR Phase II deferrals, including with respect to the applicable earnings tests, will reduce the likelihood of the Parties litigating earnings test issues in future PGA Filings.

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1 BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF OREGON 2 UG 152/UG 163 3 4 In the Matters of SUPPLEMENTAL STIPULATION 5 NORTHWEST NATURAL GAS COMPANY 6 Application for a General Rate Revision Advice No. 02-19, (UG 152) and 8 Investigation. Petition Commence (UG 163) 10 11 INTRODUCTION 12 This agreement (hereinafter, "Supplemental Stipulation") is intended to supplement 13 the Stipulation adopted by the Public Utility Commission of Oregon ("Commission") in this 14 docket in Order No. 07-426. In that Stipulation, the Parties (listed below) agreed to extend 15 the terms of Northwest Natural Gas Company's ("NW Natural" or the "Company") Weather-16 Adjusted Rate Mechanism ("WARM") and Distribution Margin Normalization ("DMN") 17 mechanisms. In addition, the Parties agreed that NW Natural would not file a rate case prior 18 to September 1, 2011 (the "Rate Case Moratorium"), except under certain conditions, 19 including the opportunity to seek recovery of its capital costs associated with its Automated 20 Meter Reading ("AMR") project. The Commission has now approved NW Natural's request 21 to defer such capital costs for later recovery,2 and the Parties wish to memorialize their 22 23 ¹ The Stipulation included two other exceptions to the Rate Case Moratorium, allowing NW Natural to file a rate case prior to September of 2011, as might be necessary to have the opportunity to recover costs associated with its Integrity Management Program, and if in the event of an "extraordinary event." Order No. 07-426, Appendix A. pp. 2-3. $^{\rm 26}$ $^{\rm 2} See$ Order No. 09-105, issued in UM 1413.

1 further agreement as to the amortization of such costs and the impact of such amortization 2 on the Rate Case Moratorium.

3 PARTIES

The Parties to this Supplemental Stipulation are as follows: Commission Staff, 5 Citizens' Utility Board ("CUB"), Northwest Industrial Gas Users ("NWIGU"), and NW Natural.

6 BACKGROUND

On September 26, 2007, the Commission approved an all-party Stipulation extending the terms of NW Natural's WARM and DMN mechanisms and establishing an annual preporting requirement for WARM. As a key provision of that Stipulation, NW Natural agreed—subject to specific qualifications—that the Company would not initiate a general rate case prior to September 1, 2011. Among the agreed-upon exceptions is the following:

If Portland General Electric receives approval of its automated metering infrastructure tariff (Docket UE 189) or otherwise notifies NW Natural that it is terminating the agreement governing the PGE and NW Natural joint meter reading territory, NW Natural intends to implement its automated meter reading ("AMR") in the territory currently covered by the JMR agreement. If the Parties do not support a request by NW Natural for the opportunity to recover the capital costs for its AMR project on an annual basis and the Parties cannot agree on an alternative form of recovery, or the Commission does not approve recovery of prudent costs pursuant to NW Natural's request, NW Natural may file a general rate case.³

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The "JMR agreement" ("JMR Agreement") referenced above is the contract between NW Natural and PGE, entered into in May of 2001, in which those two companies agreed to divide between them the meter reading routes in their overlapping territories in the Portland and Salem areas, and to each read each other's meters on their assigned routes. At the time the Parties signed the Stipulation, PGE had requested that the Commission approve an automated metering infrastructure tariff.⁴ The Stipulation specifically addressed the

³ Order No. 07-426, Appendix A, at pp. 2-3.

See, Reference to Request to Add Schedule 111, Advanced Metering Infrastructure ("AMI"), UE 189.

1 condition that if the Commission approved PGE's tariff request, PGE would no longer need
2 to dispatch personnel to read its meters, thus rendering the JMR Agreement obsolete. The
3 Parties were informed that NW Natural had already begun deployment of its own automated
4 meter reading project in non-JMR territory (the Company's "Phase I AMR Project") and that
5 if the JMR Agreement were to be dissolved, NW Natural would likely extend the AMR project
6 to cover the JMR territory (the Company's "Phase II AMR Project"). The Stipulation states
7 that, in this event, NW Natural should be allowed an opportunity to recover its prudently
8 incurred capital costs for its AMR project, either through a rate case or other alternative
9 mechanism.

On May 5, 2008, the Commission approved PGE's proposed tariff to recover AMR costs.⁵ Two days later, PGE provided NW Natural with formal notice of its intent to terminate the JMR Agreement. NW Natural completed its financial analysis of a project to deploy its own AMR system in the JMR territory and began work on Phase II in August 2008. The current schedule anticipates that Phase II will be complete in December 2009. The total capital cost for the Phase II project is estimated to be approximately \$30 million.

On January 14, 2009, the Company filed a petition requesting authorization to defer the revenue requirement related to the installation of the Phase II AMR Project.⁶ The purpose of the petition was to allow NW Natural an opportunity to recover its net costs of service associated with the Phase II AMR project until those cost could be reflected in

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⁵ Order No. 08-245, issued in UE 189.

⁶ See, Application for Authorization to Defer Expenses Related to the Installation of Automated Meter Reading, filed in UM 1413. The Company did not request deferral of costs related to the Phase I.

1 permanent rates.⁷ In its Order No. 09-105, issued in UM 1413, the Commission adopted
 2 Staff's recommendation and approved NW Natural's deferral request.⁸

3 STIPULATION

Whereas, the Parties agree to support NW Natural's recovery of its revenue requirement subject to earnings reviews described below associated with the prudently incurred capital costs for its Phase II AMR Project through a deferral mechanism, and

Whereas, the Parties understand that NW Natural plans to file annual requests for 8 the renewal of its authority to defer its revenue requirement associated with its Phase II 9 AMR Project until such costs have been considered in a general rate filing, the Parties agree 10 as follows:

- 1. The Parties agree to support NW Natural's recovery of the revenue requirement associated with prudently incurred capital costs for the Phase II AMR Project through amortization of the amounts deferred pursuant to Commission orders issued in UM 1413⁹ (or any other order approving the Company's request to defer capital costs for the Phase II AMR Project), subject to an earnings review, as described in Paragraph 4 below and subject to audit of those capital costs and the terms and conditions of this Supplemental Stipulation.
- The Parties agree to support renewal of the Phase II AMR Project deferral applications each year until the effective date of rates set in NW Natural's next general rate case.

21 22 ⁷ *Id.*, at p. 4.

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⁸ The Parties are, however, now proposing a different earnings test period than the period contemplated in the Commission-adopted Staff Report.

 ⁹ UM 1413 describes the method in which the Company should calculate the associated revenue
 requirement minus depreciation and the avoided Operations and maintenance expense related to savings from JMR.

- 1 3. The Parties agree to support the amortization of all of NW Natural's prudently incurred Phase II AMR Project cost deferrals as described herein.
- 4. The Parties agree that the earnings review applied to amortization of Phase II AMR Project cost deferrals will be conducted in a manner consistent with ORS 757.259. For purposes of this Stipulation, the Parties agree that NW Natural will be allowed to amortize the deferral except to the extent that recovery would cause the Company's return on equity ("ROE") during the earnings review period, described in Paragraph 6 below, to exceed the Company's authorized ROE in effect during the earnings review period. The shareholders' portion of WACOG variances deferred pursuant to NW Natural's purchased gas cost adjustment mechanism ("PGA") will be excluded from the earnings test described in this paragraph.
 - 5. The Parties recognize that during the amortization periods of Phase II AMR Project cost deferrals, the Company may be amortizing the customer share of excess gas costs deferred pursuant to its PGA. The Parties agree that for purposes of applying the amortization cap contained in ORS 757.259(6), the Company should be allowed to amortize the full amount (after application of the earnings test described in Paragraph 4 above) of Phase II AMR Project cost deferral each calendar year, unless the amortization of all deferrals subject to ORS 757.259(6), excluding costs deferred pursuant the Company's PGA mechanism or other costs deferred pursuant to ORS 757.259(7), would result in a surcharge in excess of three percent of the Company's gross revenues for the preceding calendar year. The Parties agree that any amounts not allowed to be amortized in any given year as a result of applying ORS 757.259(6) should be amortized in a subsequent period.

- 1 6. NW Natural will seek amortization of Phase II AMR Project deferred amounts
 2 concomitantly with the Company's annual PGA Filings.
 - a. The 2010 request for amortization will include AMR Phase II amounts deferred from January 14, 2009 December 31, 2009. The earnings review period for this amortization will be the calendar year 2009. This deferred amount will be subject to the earnings test in Paragraph 4 above to determine the allowable recovery amount and then will be amortized from November 1, 2010, through October 31, 2011. The 2011 request for amortization will include AMR Phase II amounts deferred from January 1, 2010 through December 31, 2010. The earnings review period for this amortization is the calendar year 2010. The deferred amount will be subject to the earnings test described in paragraph 4 above to determine the allowable recovery amount and then will be amortized from November 1, 2011, through October 31, 2012, along with any residual over-or-under collection from the previous year's amortization. NW Natural will seek subsequent amortizations of Phase II AMR Project deferred amounts consistent with this paragraph, subject to Paragraph 6.b below.
 - b. For the purposes of subsequent requests for amortization of AMR Phase II Project costs deferred pursuant to this Supplemental Stipulation, the applicable earnings review period will be the calendar year of the first deferral month for which amortization is being sought. For instance, when the Company requests amortization of AMR Phase II Project cost amounts deferred from January 1, 2011 December 31, 2011, the earnings review period for this amortization will be the calendar year 2011.
- 7. The Parties agree that amounts amortized pursuant to this Supplemental Stipulation will be spread an equal percentage of margin basis for customer

- classes participating in the AMR project—those customers taking sales service under Schedules 1, 2, 3, and 31.
- The Stipulation is offered into the record of this docket pursuant to OAR 860-014-0085. The Parties agree to support the Stipulation throughout this proceeding and any appeal, to provide witnesses to sponsor the Stipulation at any hearing held in this docket and recommend that the Commission issue an order adopting the settlement contained herein.
- 8 9. The Parties have negotiated the Stipulation as an integrated document. If the 9 Commission rejects any material portion of the Stipulation or conditions its 10 approval upon the imposition of additional material conditions, any Party 11 disadvantaged by such action shall have the right, upon written notice to the 12 Commission and all Parties within 15 business days of the Commission's order to 13 withdraw from this Stipulation, pursue its rights under OAR 860-014-0085 and 14 shall be entitled to seek reconsideration of the Commission's order. However, 15 prior to withdrawal, the Party shall engage in good faith negotiation with the other Parties. 16 No Party withdrawing from this Stipulation shall be bound to any 17 position, commitment, or condition of this Stipulation.
- 18 10. By entering into this Stipulation, no Party shall be deemed to have approved,
 19 admitted to, or consented to the facts, principles, methods or theories employed
 20 by any other Party in arriving at the terms of the Stipulation nor to have agreed to
 21 the application of the methodology set forth in this Stipulation in any other
 22 context.
- 23 11. This Stipulation may be executed in counterparts and each signed counterpart 24 shall constitute an original document.
- 25 12. Each Party enters into the Stipulation on the date below.

1	NW NATURAL GAS COMPANY	CITIZENS' UTILITY BOARD
2	The state of the community	OF OREGON
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4 5	Dated: /0/21/09	Dated:
6	OPUC STAFF	NORTHWEST INDUSTRIAL GAS USERS
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