



November 10, 2021

Via Electronic Filing

Filing Center
Public Utility Commission of Oregon
201 High Street SE, Suite 100
P.O. Box 1088
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Docket AR 638 - Wildfire Mitigation Rulemaking

Attention: Filing Center

The utilities of the Oregon People's Utility District Association (OPUDA) appreciate the opportunity to submit comments into the record concerning the Public Utility Commission of Oregon's (OPUC) draft rules for AR 638.

1. OAR 860-024-0016 - Minimum Vegetation Clearance Requirements

The addition of a minimum three-year trim cycle requirement is proposed in OAR 860-024-0016. OPUDA utilities recognize the need for vegetation management cycles, but reserves that a specific trim cycle should not be mandated by the OPUC. Species, climate, as well as other factors, vary widely across Oregon and determine the growth rate of vegetation in a given area. Therefore, it follows that the frequency of a trim cycle necessary to maintain clearances will also vary from one area to another.

OPUDA supports changing the proposed language in OAR 860-024-0016 (3) to allow Operators an opportunity to determine a trim cycle that meets the established clearance requirements. If the Operator is found to be in non-compliance with the minimum clearances, then an alternative trim cycle can be imposed.

OAR 860-024-0016 (7) lists factors Operators must consider in determining the extent of trimming or vegetation removal. OAR 860-024-0016 (7) (f) indicates that Operators must consider trimming or vegetation removal inside and outside the right-of-way to minimize cycle busters. OPUDA utilities do not have the right to trim outside the right-of-way unless it is a hazard tree and therefore does not support inclusion of OAR 860-024-0016 (7) (f) in the final rules.

2. OAR 860-24-0018 - High Risk Zone Safety Standards

OAR 860-024-0018 (3) (b) states that Operators will perform detailed inspections “via onsite climbing or high-powered spotting scope.” Some of the OPUDA utilities currently require climbing inspections and are aware of only one contractor in the State of Oregon that can perform this service. The inspector is qualified to go to the communications level of the poles and is planning to retire in the near term. OPUDA does not support language in OAR 860-024-0018 (3) (b) that prescribes the inspection means, as other technologies are available, including drones.

3. Trees from Outside the Right-of-Way

In recent years, OPUDA utilities have allocated significant resources to vegetation management in order to deliver safe and reliable power to customers as well as mitigate for wildfire risk. While significant progress has been made in addressing vegetation in the right-of-ways, trees from outside of the right-of-way continue to be the primary source of fire-ignitions on our systems.

As utilities cannot maintain trees outside of their right-of-ways, OPUDA recommends that the OPUC identify and engage with landowners adjacent to power lines – specifically in high fire risk areas - to inform them of their responsibility regarding fire ignitions that emanate from trees on their property making contact with power lines. The proposed rules in their current form do not address fire ignitions that emanate from vegetation outside the right-of-ways.

Respectively,

/s/ Ty Hillebrand

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