RE: Docket No. 20A-0258E

Dear Colorado Public Utilities Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Tri-State’s Electric Resource Plan (ERP.) I am a homeowner in Ridgway, Colorado and a coop member of San Miguel Power Association (SMPA.) I also am engaged in small-scale vegetable production for my family and community. According to 2017 data from the US Energy Information Administration, SMPA ranked 10th in highest electricity prices out of 40 electric providers rated. It is noteworthy that nine of the top ten purchase their energy from Tri-State, while all twelve of the lowest costing electric providers are NOT members of Tri-State. According to a 2018 Rocky Mountain Institute study, during the decade from 2007 to 2017, Tri-State’s rates rose five times faster than the national average, and according to Western Way, Tri-State’s 2019 costs were 212% more than other regional wholesalers. The manifestations and reality of these statistics are significantly impacting people in my community where cost of living is exorbitant, and wages are not commensurate with expenses. I believe that the high costs of electricity from Tri-State are, in part, due to Tri-State continuing to rely on dirty, expensive coal to generate electricity instead of moving rapidly toward renewables.

I wish to emphasize that I am even more concerned about climate impacts and pollution caused by coal and natural gas electricity generation than by the monetary cost. The costs to our planets’ health, air and water quality, ecosystem resilience, and human health are far greater and more enduring than the costs reflected on our monthly electric bill. Here on Colorado’s western slope drought is significantly impacting agriculture and the ski industry. Wildfires are a constant threat and unpredictable weather a daily concern. Today on December 24, it is raining at 7,000 feet. Our internationally renowned Ouray Ice Park has yet to open due to lack of climbable ice. There is no snow on the ground, and Telluride ski area, which typically opens on Thanksgiving Friday, is still not open. Our home is equipped with eight solar panels (a fairly modest system) that produce more electricity than we utilize. We did not install these solar panels to save money (as we won’t recoup our costs for 12-15 years) but rather to lower our carbon footprint and produce clean energy for our home and our community. We are committed to energy conservation and clean energy production. It is the right and ethical choice for our planet and generations to come. I encourage the PUC to hold Tri-State accountable to an ERP that considers the true costs of electrical generation including climate impacts, ecosystem integrity, and human health.

I am pleased to see in the current version of the ERP that Tri-State intends to increase renewables (compared with 2005) by 2GW by 2030 and retire 1.75GW of coal-derived energy by 2030, thereby reducing carbon pollution by 80% and producing 62% of Tri-State’s energy from renewable sources. However, Tri-State could do even better if it were to close the Craig coal-fired power plant by 2026 instead of waiting until 2030. I strongly urge the PUC to recommend full retirement of this plant as soon as possible and no later than 2026. I also support Tri-State’s financial commitment to just transition for Craig facility employees impacted by the closure of the power plant. Tri-State has been negligent in supporting the Nucla community following retirement of that power plan. Tri-State needs to commit now to financing a just transition for the Nucla community. It is not too late to have an impact and transition funds are desperately need in the rural West End of Montrose County. I have personally witnessed the economic crisis experienced by Nucla/Naturita due to the closure of that plant. Tri-State has profited significantly from the labor of that community, and the corporation has a responsibility to support those families that have contributed to the industry’s wealth.

Finally, I understand Tri-State is also exploring acquisitions in 2030 and beyond and considering investments in new on-demand natural gas facilities or new on-demand renewable capacity – including some technologies that are yet to exist at a production level. I am a strong proponent of the renewable option, because natural gas results in much unnecessary climate impacts, not the least of which is methane pollution which, as you likely know, contributes to greenhouse gas effects at a rate 86 times that of carbon dioxide. In addition, fracking for natural gas devastates the environment with its excessive use of water and contamination of water and soils.

Thank you again for taking comments from the public during this critical time in Colorado’s future related to energy, climate and environment. I ask that you hold Tri-State to the highest standards and encourage safe, renewable electricity production.

Sincerely,

Robyn Cascade