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TO: Directors, Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska
 Lincoln, NB

FROM: George Sibley, 315 W. Ohio Ave., Gunnison, CO 81230

SUBJECT: Draft Integrated Resource Plan

I am a freelance writer and resident of the City of Gunnison, Colorado, for which Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska provides most of the electric power. I have perused with interest the draft Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for the period from now through 2038 – probably one of the most critical periods for human life on Planet Earth.

This critical period is the time we still have, according to a consensus of global climate scientists, to stop increasing the amount of fossil-fuel carbon gases we are putting into the atmosphere, with emissions peaking by 2025 and decreasing thereafter, or we will be moving into a climatic chaos that may make much of the American Southwest unlivable for humans in the second half of this century.

Nowhere in the MEAN IRP, however, is there any sense of urgency about reducing human causes of a warming, drying climate prone to extreme weather. The MEAN website features an attractive but vague brochure promising that by 2050 MEAN energy will be “carbon neutral” – the low bar in the spectrum of goals for addressing the climate crisis. It means only that MEAN will still be cranking carbon gases into the atmosphere, but (we) will be paying others to take carbon gases out of the atmosphere, through tree plantations or other forms of carbon sequestration, thus being “neutral” globally with no increase in carbon emissions, even though no overall reduction is taking place.

But in the IRP, MEAN’s more specific projections for 2038 show the percentage of fossil-fueled energy in their service area not reduced by 2038, which means it will be growing along with the region’s population, since most additional demand management ideas are rejected for cost reasons. And a somewhat alarming fourth of the MEAN-supplied energy by 2038 is designated only as “Future,” a “source” for which detailed explanation was not found in the hasty search mandated by the short review time, except for occasional references to “carbon capture and sequestration,” the former being an idea not yet demonstrated on a large or affordable scale, and sequestration being a limited and vulnerable solution, given the growing number of large wildfires in the tree world. Can we assume that MEAN would probably try to make up the “Future” gap between diminished supply and growing demand with another gas-fired generator or even more coal-fired production?

Of the “portfolios” for energy production analyzed for the western area, the hydro portfolio looks good on paper, but it seems clear that hydropower is becoming an increasingly undependable source in a warming and drying world. WAPA is already having to supplement the waning hydro generation with what it can find on the open market, and the carbon status of that energy is not described.


Clearly the solar portfolio “with additional leased capacity from member generation” is the best option, given the need for more carbon-free renewables – no scarcity of sunshine in a

warming and drying time – and there is a growing will in many communities for funding solar arrays, both as individual and community projects. I was pleased to hear our Gunnison representative on the board speak on behalf of solar energy at the public session on April 21; Gunnison is currently covering its airport parking area with a 0.75 mW solar array. It would be excellent to see MEAN collaborate with local communities on this kind of project so that such projects would not count against the five percent limit on local generation. Solar energy works best as distributed generation, and distributed generation is less vulnerable to massive power failures than centralized generation.

In sum, without going into greater detail in the short time given for public response to the IRP, it shows MEAN to be moving into the future timidly and reluctantly at best, when the times seem to require creative leadership. We can understand without necessarily condoning the MEAN staff's reluctance to move away from investments in fossil-fuel energy made in a more innocent era, but we cannot have expansion of the use of those resources in a time when we all know better.



George Sibley



CC: Russ Forrest, Gunnison City Manager
Will Dowis, Utilities Direct, City of Gunnison