



EZELL LAW FIRM, LLC

10761 Perkins Road, Ste. A | Baton Rouge, LA 70810
telephone 225-763-2272 | facsimile 225-763-2273 | www.ezellfirm.com

October 13, 2020

RECEIVED

OCT 13 2020

LA Public Service Commission

Mr. Brandon Frey
Executive Secretary
Louisiana Public Service Commission
602 North Street
Galvez Building, 12th Floor
Baton Rouge, LA 70802

Re: Magnolia Water Utility Operating Company, LLC
Application for Approval/Non-Opposition
To Transfer Wastewater Systems Currently
Operated by Southwood Ridge Utilities, Inc.

Dear Mr. Frey:

Please find enclosed an original and three copies of Magnolia Water Utility Operating Company, LLC's Application for Non-Opposition to the sale and acquisition of the wastewater system currently operated by Southwood Ridge Utilities, Inc. After review, please see that a docket is opened in connection with this filing and that notice is placed in the Official Bulletin on October 16, 2020. Further, we ask that you exercise the discretion provided in Rule 19 and shorten the period to protest this application from twenty-five (25) to fifteen (15) days. Upon filing, please have the Records Division date stamp and return a copy of the filing by hand to our courier.

If you have any questions concerning this filing, please notify me.

Sincerely,

Ezell Law Firm, LLC


Andrew B. Ezell

CC: Ms. Jaclyn Penzo
Mr. Thomas Broady
Mr. Don Dewald

ROUTE TO Bull ROUTE FROM
DEPT. 1517 DATE 10/13 DEPT. _____
DEPT. _____ DATE _____ DEPT. _____
DEPT. _____ DATE _____ DEPT. _____
DEPT. _____ DATE _____ DEPT. _____



BEFORE THE
LOUISIANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

RECEIVED

OCT 13 2020

MAGNOLIA WATER UTILITY
OPERATING COMPANY, LLC, EX PARTE

DOCKET NO.
LA Public Service Commission

In re: Request for Letter of Approval/Non-Opposition to the Sale or Transfer of All or Substantially All of the Assets of a Wastewater Utility Regulated by the Louisiana Public Service Commission

**PETITION FOR APPROVAL/NON-OPPOSITION TO THE SALE OR TRANSFER OF
ALL OR SUBSTANTIALLY ALL OF THE ASSETS OF A WASTEWATER UTILITY
REGULATED BY
THE LOUISIANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION**

SELLER: Southwood Ridge Utilities, Inc.

BUYER: Magnolia Water Utility Operating Company, LLC

In accordance with the March 18, 1994, *General Order* regarding approval of sales and other changes in ownership or control of public utilities subject to Louisiana Public Service Commission ("Commission") jurisdiction, Magnolia Water Utility Operating Company, LLC ("Magnolia") seeks an order of approval or non-opposition from the Commission to the transfer and assignment by Southwood Ridge Utilities, Inc. (hereafter "Seller" or "Southwood Ridge") of all or substantially all of the assets and property comprising one (1) wastewater utility system providing regulated wastewater service to customers in Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana (the "System").

Magnolia is a Louisiana limited liability company, in good standing, formed to acquire the assets of water and wastewater utilities in Louisiana and to own and operate those assets as public utilities subject to the Commission's regulatory jurisdiction. Magnolia currently serves approximately 18,700 sewer connections and approximately 9,810 water connections in regulated systems in parishes throughout Louisiana. Magnolia is part of an affiliate group that includes Central States Water Resources, Inc. ("Central States"), a Missouri corporation in good standing, CSWR, LLC ("CSWR"), a Missouri limited liability company in good standing, and several other companies, some of which currently operate small water or wastewater utilities in Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana. A chart showing the companies in the affiliate group is attached hereto as **Exhibit A**. The significance of those affiliate relationships to the proposed transaction is discussed in greater detail below. The principal address of Central States and CSWR is 1650 Des Peres Road, Suite 303, St. Louis, MO 63131. The principal address of Magnolia is 10761 Perkins Road, Suite A, Baton Rouge, LA 70810. All notices and other official documents related to the application should be sent to the attention of Andrew B. Ezell, c/o Ezell Law Firm, LLC, 10761 Perkins Road, Suite A, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70810, or at the following email address: aezell@ezellfirm.com. Copies also should be sent to Josiah Cox, President, Mike Duncan, Assistant Vice President, and Russ Mitten, General Counsel, at the address shown in the preceding

sentence or at the following email addresses: jcox@cswrgroup.com; mduncan@cswrgroup.com; rmitten@cswrgroup.com.

Southwood Ridge currently provides wastewater services to approximately twenty-nine (29) connections in the Southwood Ridge Subdivision in Tangipahoa Parish. Southwood Ridge is a Louisiana corporation, in good standing, whose principal office address is 17156 Old Covington Hwy., Hammond, Louisiana 70403. All notices and other official documents related to the application should be sent to the attention of Phil Livingston, 2 Oakley Drive, Hammond, Louisiana 70401, or at the following email address: phil4779@att.net.

The Seller proposes to sell, transfer and assign to Magnolia all of its franchises, works, operations, systems, land and related improvements, easements, rights-of-way, permits, leases, service facilities, equipment, machinery, lines, plant, pipes, manholes and appurtenances, supplies, and other assets used to provide regulated wastewater services to the System. Magnolia and Seller have entered into a formal purchase and sale agreement ("Sale Agreement") specifying the terms of the proposed transaction, which is attached hereto as **Exhibit B** and incorporated herein by reference. In accordance with Rule 12.1 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, Exhibit B has been designated "Confidential" because it contains information regarding strategies employed in contract negotiations and other competitively sensitive information.

The proposed transaction is scheduled to close (a) within forty-five (45) days of the effective date of any required regulatory approval, (b) upon satisfaction of Seller's representations, warranties, and conditions set forth in the Sale Agreement or (c) at such other time as the parties mutually agree. During the period between the date of the Commission's order and the scheduled closing date, Southwood Ridge and Magnolia will cooperate to satisfy all remaining closing conditions specified in the Sale Agreement and take other steps necessary to ensure the proposed sale does not adversely affect customers. At closing, Magnolia will adopt and provide service in accordance with tariff rates and fees currently in effect for Southwood Ridge.

The need to comply with increasingly stringent federal and state health and environmental regulations has imposed cost and compliance burdens small wastewater utilities are finding difficult, if not impossible, to bear. Difficulty in securing capital necessary to make investments or expenditures for improvements required to bring systems into full regulatory compliance has forced many such utilities to seek buyers for those systems whose technical, managerial, and financial resources make them better able to bear those burdens. This motivation is especially strong for system owners, particularly developers, whose primary business is not the operation of regulated wastewater utilities.

Magnolia is the type of qualified buyer that small system operators and developers seek out to assure that customers receive safe, efficient and reliable water and wastewater operations and service. Through its relationship with CSWR (which acts as a service company for the group) and other companies within the affiliate group, Magnolia has access to highly skilled technical, managerial, and financial experts and resources not usually available to small water and wastewater companies. Magnolia's access to CSWR's personnel provides extensive experience in the technical, managerial, and financial aspects of the utility industry, particularly small systems,

and also innovative operational, marketing, and customer service programs that provide high quality advanced services at fair and reasonable rates.

Magnolia is a Commission-authorized operator of water and wastewater systems in Louisiana. Magnolia currently operates numerous water and wastewater systems throughout the state. Thus far, most of the systems Magnolia has acquired, if not all, have experienced some degree of operational neglect, with several recording numerous, and oftentimes ongoing violations of applicable health and environmental regulations. Significant capital improvements have been completed in many of the systems currently operated by Magnolia, and most are operating in full compliance with the rules and regulations of all applicable regulatory authorities. Those systems currently not in compliance are being systematically brought into compliance. Magnolia's systems are currently operated pursuant to agreements with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals concerning the timing and methodology required to bring troubled systems into post-acquisition compliance.

As previously noted, consummation of the proposed transfer of assets is contingent upon receipt of Commission approval to the transaction of the System. To secure approval of the transaction, Magnolia provides the following information required by the March 18, 1994, *General Order*.

1. The proposed transfer of assets to Magnolia is in the public interest. Magnolia and its affiliates have the technical, managerial, and financial expertise and experience necessary to own and operate the utility assets it proposes to acquire and ready access to sufficient financial resources to make necessary capital investments and expenditures, if necessary, required to bring the system into compliance with current and future health and environmental regulations. Moreover, Magnolia is committed to providing customers safe, efficient and reliable service at fair and reasonable rates.
2. Magnolia is ready, willing, and able to provide safe, reliable, and adequate service to customers of the system it proposes to acquire and to do so at rates that are fair and reasonable.
3. Magnolia's only business is ownership and operation of small water and wastewater systems. Further, because of its ability to readily access any capital necessary to bring the subject system into compliance with health and environmental regulations and operate the System in a manner consistent with those regulations, Magnolia's acquisition of the system assets will certainly enhance the financial condition of the System.
4. The system Magnolia proposes to acquire has, in the past, failed to satisfy one or more health or environmental regulations. As detailed elsewhere in the petition, Magnolia has identified capital investments and expenditures necessary to correct past problems and ensure that in the future the system would be operated in full compliance with all applicable regulations. These system improvements and Magnolia's commitment to operate the system in a manner that ensures customers receive safe, reliable, and adequate service at a fair price will combine to maintain or improve the overall quality of service customers of the system currently receive.

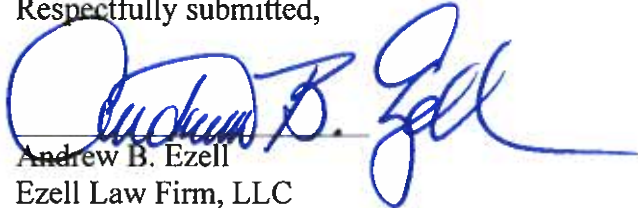
5. Authorizing Magnolia to acquire the System will bring both short and long-term benefits for customers. Technical, managerial, and financial resources available from its affiliates will enable Magnolia to quickly identify and remedy any deficiencies in the operation or management of the subject system. Also, because of economies of scale available to Magnolia as an affiliate of CSWR, Magnolia can access and utilize those resources at a lower cost than would otherwise be available to a stand-alone company. As explained below, Magnolia's affiliate group also has access to funds required to make capital investments and expenditures necessary to ensure the system provides safe, efficient and reliable service that complies with all applicable health and environmental regulations.
6. The transaction would not adversely affect competition because Southwood Ridge is the only wastewater utility authorized to serve customers within its service area.
7. As noted elsewhere herein, personnel from Central States and CSWR have far greater technical, managerial, and financial expertise and experience than is available to most small wastewater utilities. These personnel would be actively involved in overseeing Magnolia's day-to-day operations and in assisting the company in planning any system improvements and additions necessary to provide safe, efficient and reliable service. As a result of the involvement of these highly skilled and experienced utility professionals, the quality of service that Magnolia can provide to customers will be greatly improved and enhanced.
8. Magnolia intends to hire a qualified and experienced third-party contractor to manage and operate the System day-to-day. It is Magnolia's intent that the third-party contractor offer employment to most, if not all, qualified current employees of Southwood Ridge, if any.
9. The proposed transfer would be fair and reasonable to Southwood Ridge, as evidenced by the fact that the independent executor of the owner's estate and the sole board member of Southwood Ridge negotiated the financial terms of the transaction and executed the Sale Agreement. Further, Magnolia and Southwood Ridge have no other business relationship or family affiliations. The terms of the transaction satisfy both Magnolia and Southwood Ridge and are the result of fair, arms-length negotiation.
10. The proposed transaction will have an overall positive effect on state and local economies. From a local property tax standpoint, the transfer of assets should have no adverse effect on state or local taxing authorities. If the transaction is approved, only the identity of the taxpayer would change. And overall, the proposed transaction should prove beneficial to the state of Louisiana and the local communities where Southwood Ridge's customers reside. All those entities have an interest in ensuring their citizens receive safe, adequate, and reliable water and wastewater services at fair and reasonable rates. Authorizing Magnolia to acquire Southwood Ridge's assets would produce that desired result.
11. Magnolia concedes the Commission's authority to regulate its rates and operations in the manner prescribed by Louisiana law. Therefore, the proposed transfer would have no effect on the Commission's jurisdiction over the System.

12. Neither Southwood Ridge nor Magnolia anticipates any adverse consequences to customers or other interested stakeholders if the Commission approves the transaction proposed in the petition. Both parties are committed to ensuring the sale of assets is concluded and operational authority over those assets is transferred in a manner that is as transparent as possible and causes no adverse effects to customers.
13. Magnolia was formed for the purpose of acquiring and operating water and wastewater utilities in Louisiana. It has a good, but limited, track record of regulatory compliance in Louisiana. However, Central States, through its work with other companies within Magnolia's affiliated group, has compiled an enviable record of acquiring severely distressed systems, bringing them into compliance, and then successfully operating those systems in full compliance with health and environmental regulations. Affiliated companies within the group operating in Missouri and Kentucky have a good customer service and operating reputation with utility regulators in that state. (Arkansas, the other state where Magnolia's affiliates currently operate, does not regulate rates or operations of small water and wastewater utilities.)
14. Through its affiliated group, Magnolia has ready access to capital required to make necessary investments and expenditures in the subject system. CSWR will provide the equity financing necessary to make the proposed asset acquisition. Ongoing capital needs will be financed through debt from providers approved by the Commission on terms and conditions that accurately reflect the current state of this system. Current plans envision a capital structure for Magnolia consisting of fifty percent (50%) equity and fifty percent (50%) debt. CSWR's consolidated income statement and balance sheet for 2019 is attached hereto as **Exhibit C** and incorporated by reference. In accordance with Rule 12.1 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, **Exhibit C** has been designated "Confidential" because it contains competitively sensitive information.
15. Based on initial due diligence efforts so far, Magnolia has determined that the Southwood Ridge Wastewater System currently serves approximately 29 residential customers in the Southwood Ridge Subdivision. The Southwood Ridge Wastewater System was originally constructed in 1974 and little or no investment has occurred. Accordingly, both the wastewater collection system and wastewater treatment facility are in poor to very poor condition and in need of substantial repair and rehabilitation. A more detailed description of the wastewater system, including an Estimate of Probable Construction Costs, is contained in the Assessment Report prepared Barowka and Bonura Engineers and Consultants, LLC and attached here as **Exhibit D**. In accordance with Rule 12.1 of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, **Exhibit D** has been designated "Confidential" because it contains competitively sensitive information.
16. Magnolia's affiliates always hire a qualified and experienced third-party contractor to manage and operate the subject wastewater system day-to-day and will ensure the contractor's personnel have or obtain all required health, safety, and other permits.
17. Magnolia, through CSWR, will invest equity capital to purchase Southwood Ridge's assets. Consequently, the asset purchase would not encumber the utility's assets in any

way. Ongoing capital needs will be financed through debt from providers approved by the Commission on terms and conditions that accurately reflect the current state of the System.

18. The acquisition of assets proposed in the petition is fair and reasonable in all respects. Consequently, the Commission should not impose or attach any conditions to the transaction.

Respectfully submitted,



Andrew B. Ezell

Ezell Law Firm, LLC

10761 Perkins Road, Suite A

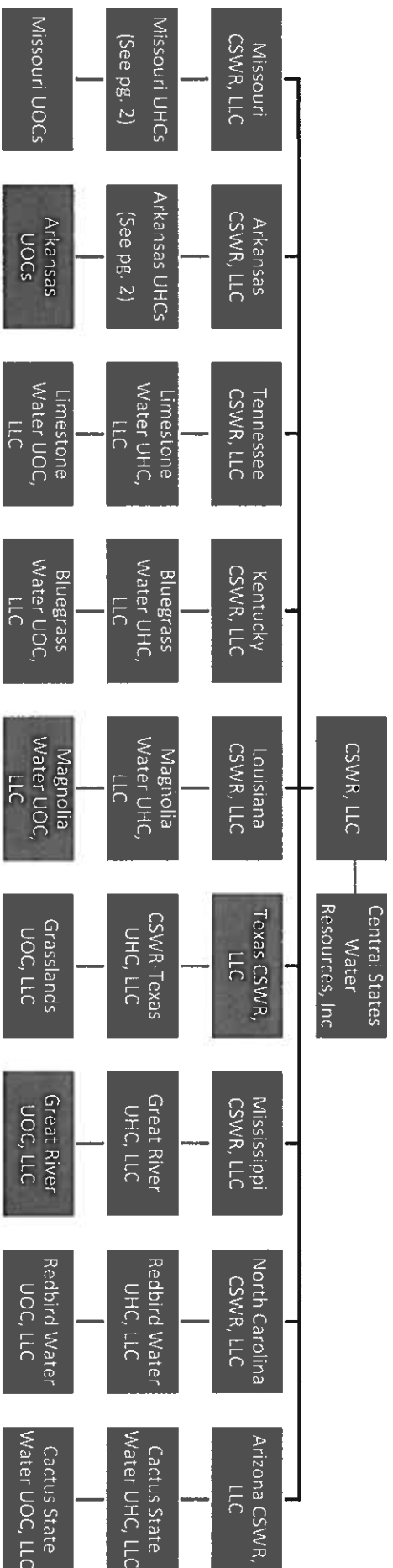
Baton Rouge, LA 70810

Telephone: (225) 763-2272

Facsimile: (225) 763-2273

aezell@ezellfirm.com

Central States Water Resources Corporate Entity Organizational Chart



Missouri & Arkansas CSWR Organizational Chart Detail

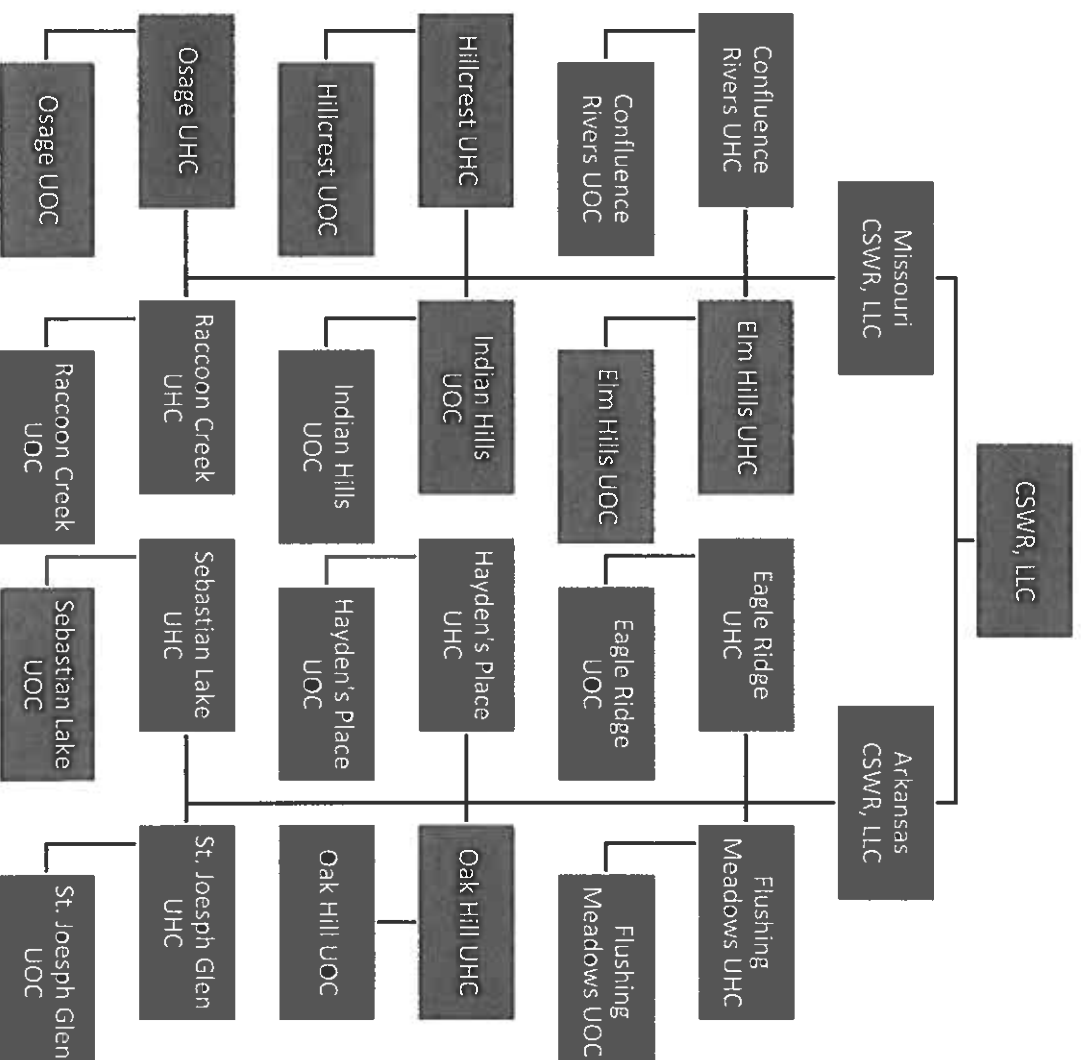


EXHIBIT B - PUBLIC

In accordance with Rule 12.1 of the Louisiana Public Service Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, this exhibit has been designated "confidential" and submitted under seal as it contains information regarding strategies employed in contract negotiations and other competitively sensitive information.

EXHIBIT C - PUBLIC

In accordance with Rule 12.1 of the Louisiana Public Service Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, this exhibit has been designated "confidential" and submitted under seal as it contains information regarding strategies employed in contract negotiations and other competitively sensitive information.

EXHIBIT D - PUBLIC

In accordance with Rule 12.1 of the Louisiana Public Service Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, this exhibit has been designated "confidential" and submitted under seal as it contains information regarding strategies employed in contract negotiations and other competitively sensitive information.