



# City of Whitefish

## Neptune® 360™ Streamlines Operations for the City of Whitefish

Historically a railroad and logging town, today, the City of Whitefish is a rapidly growing community in northwest Montana with a population of approximately 7,000 people. A popular resort area that offers a diverse landscape including ski slopes and a lake, Whitefish was challenged to balance the limited municipal water supply with the increasing demand. In response, in 2019, Whitefish adopted water ordinances.

### THE LURE OF EFFICIENCY

When Utility Services Supervisor, Rose Elliot, joined the City of Whitefish in 2000, she inherited an old DOS system and a wide array of meters from different manufacturers that serviced around 5,000 accounts over 27 routes. The lack of interoperability and antiquated system components made the entire process of meter reading-to-billing extremely labor intensive and inefficient. “Using a number of different manufacturer meters created a disjointed system that was very ‘hands-on’ and required an excessive amount of staff attention for every step of the process,” said Elliot.

Manual meter reading and data transfer, which took up to two days to upload data files, was time-consuming, labor-intensive, and highly susceptible to human error. Billing for the entire city could only be completed in sections, which mandated readings be conducted three times each month. Bills were printed and mailed to customers, which greatly added to the staff workload and reduced customer service responsiveness to high consumption inquiries. This issue was exacerbated by some of the more remote locations of the service area.

The decision was made to install Neptune® products throughout the city, updating the old meters and software, and allowing for an easy migration to a drive-by/walk-by Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system. This transition would also lay the groundwork for an eventual Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI).



### CUSTOMER

City of Whitefish, Montana

### SERVICE TERRITORY

The City of Whitefish serves 7,000 people in northwestern Montana.

### SOLUTION BENEFITS

Received Neptune 360's real-time data for possible leak detection and faster billing inquiry resolution

Reduced three billing cycles down to one

Decreased file uploads and route assignments from two hours to less than 15 minutes

Reduced total consumption to comply with water conservation ordinance

## TACKLING DATA COMMUNICATION ISSUES WITH SOFTWARE

Whitefish chose the Neptune MACH 10<sup>®</sup> ultrasonic meter, in part for its lighter weight, which facilitated easier and safer installation. The meter was also selected for its greater accuracy, which was immediately realized. Initially, Whitefish installed Neptune's N\_SIGHT<sup>™</sup> software, allowing for communication with all meters, walk-by/drive-by meter reading capabilities, and the flexibility to provide mobile data logging. Additional benefits were realized in 2020 when the City converted to Neptune's next generation software, Neptune<sup>®</sup> 360<sup>™</sup>. The cloud-based data management system delivers real-time data, giving Whitefish better information for possible leak detection and faster billing inquiry resolution. Neptune 360 also allowed Whitefish to access their data from anywhere, at any time with an internet connection.

Neptune 360 generates vital account information, such as consumption reports and data logging that is synced and stored to the Head End System (HES). The ability to securely and easily email this information to customers has aided the City in addressing bill inquiries and providing high consumption details more rapidly and efficiently in real time. Additionally, the City can also leverage reports to comply with auditors' requests.

The Neptune 360 mapping system automatically informs Whitefish of any locations where there are unread meters, allowing for quicker route completion, which enabled the City to improve their allocation of resources and combine two jobs into one. They were also able to reduce their three billing cycles down to one and decrease file uploads and route assignments from two hours to less than 15



minutes. Additionally, Neptune 360 allows Whitefish to immediately dispatch a meter technician for further investigation when a leak is suspected. "Migrating to Neptune 360 provided us with all the tools that we needed to impact significant system-wide improvement. It is the greatest asset that we could have as a water utility," commented Elliot.

## SAVING TIME AND MONEY WITH NEPTUNE 360

The City of Whitefish has experienced the benefits of streamlining operational processes to realize time and financial savings. Neptune 360 has enabled them to efficiently collect, analyze, and share metering data to reduce consumption, improve customer satisfaction, and comply with the City's water conservation ordinance.

"As Neptune products have evolved, so did our processes – allowing us to continue to streamline and work more quickly and efficiently. I am a huge fan of Neptune. You are wasting your time if you are not using Neptune products because nothing works as well," added Elliot.



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