

COMMUNITY WATER SYSTEM PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

Falls Water, a local water utility in southeast Idaho, has been providing water to a portion of Bonneville County for over 60 years. In 1999, Falls Water served 1,800 customers. During the mid-2000s, the company managed through an intense period of growth, adding 1,300 system connections in just a few years. Today, they serve 5,400 customers and the number continues to grow.

As the region grew, Falls Water encountered multiple challenges related to maintaining and updating infrastructure. Like many small systems, it was forced to juggle and sometimes postpone much-needed maintenance and plans for expansion. Projects that once cost in the hundreds of thousands of dollars to execute now pushed into the millions. Falls Water began its search for a partner to help them keep pace with the growth, and keep the system running safely and reliably.

NW Natural Water provides capital to fund Falls Water's growth

Falls Water found the partner they needed in NW Natural Water. "Partnering with NW Natural Water has really been a boon to getting things done. We're no longer forced to defer important infrastructure projects," says Tony Wise, Falls Water operations manager. "The last major project we completed prior to being acquired was constructing a new well, but there were many more projects on our list."

An especially pressing item was a complex looping project that exceeded a million dollars. NW Natural Water provided ready access to infrastructure investment capital to help build the loop. The project allowed Falls Water to sustain the desirable water pressure required by their customers while the service area continued to expand.

NW Natural Water also helped enable a study to determine and prioritize critical capital expenditures. The study produced a master plan that helps Falls Water keep the Idaho PUC, DEQ and others apprised of future system improvements, and the company ahead of the regulatory curve.



A positive impact on daily operations

Working with NW Natural Water has given Scott Bruce, Falls Water general manager, and Wise access to people and departments with utility industry experience, which has made their jobs easier. For Wise, that means he can focus 100% on system operations. "Being able to pick up the phone and connect with a person who knows exactly what I'm talking about, and who is invested in the solution, has been great," says Wise.

As for Bruce, partnering with NW Natural Water means he can tap into a seasoned legal department well-versed in dealing with public utility commissions. "It's great to enlist the help of NW Natural Water to help with rate case issues – especially some of the more complex ones," Bruce explains.

Looking ahead

Now that Falls Water and NW Natural Water are working together, Bruce and Wise feel confident they have the resources to meet future demands. "Since the acquisition, Falls Water is well-positioned to keep up with the region's increasing population," says Bruce. "We're a fine utility company, and with NW Natural Water's support, we're excited about and looking forward to growth," adds Wise.

PARTNERS IN SAFETY

Falls Water and NW Natural Water share a mutual commitment to safety and consider it a top priority. Recently, Bruce and Wise attended a safety summit sponsored by NW Natural Water's sister company, NW Natural Gas. The annual day-long event reviewed a host of proactive safety measures that employees can implement on the job. "It's great to partner with a company that has hands-on experience with safety issues that affect the utility industry. We intend to send more of our employees to safety training in the future."

– Tony Wise, Falls Water operations manager