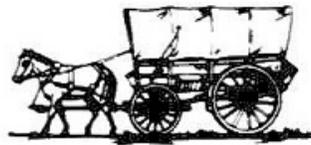




Photograph: Lee Anne Bayne



**PIONEER WATER**



## CASE STUDY

# Pioneer and the Case of the Missing Water

*A Wyoming utility solved a longstanding mystery—and saved big bucks—by switching to Metron’s smart water solution*

As a small utility provider, Pioneer Water & Sewer District of Casper, Wyoming, is used to dealing with big challenges. For many years, though, the toughest problem of all was simply figuring out where all their water was going. “I became manager of Pioneer in 2007, and have been fighting with water loss ever since,” says District Manager Lee Anne Bayne.

Of course, Pioneer used master meters and submeters to keep tabs on its network, which comprises around 350 active connections across rural Natrona County. But manually collected data wasn’t enough to pinpoint the places where water was being lost. “We had been fighting internally over our water loss, literally fighting over it, because we couldn’t get the data we needed,” Bayne says. “The meters we were using gave us data one month after the fact, which wasn’t enough to figure anything out.”

That changed in 2023, when Pioneer installed Metron’s cellular smart meters, and gained the daily insights and high-resolution flow data needed to visualize water consumption across their service area. “Metron gave us high-quality data and remote meter reading more cost-effectively than anything else we’d looked at,” Bayne says. “That meant we could finally figure out where our water was going—and because of that, we’ve reduced our water loss by over 50%.”

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## Where was Pioneer's water going?

Part of the problem, it turned out, was that the meters installed by Pioneer's previous vendor couldn't cope with the unique needs of Natrona County's residents and businesses. "We're a rural provider, and our customers just don't use water the same way that folks do in the city," Bayne explains.

On many Wyoming rural properties, for instance, far more water is needed for irrigation and watering livestock during the dry summer months. In many cases, it turned out, local water users were using open-ended frost-free hydrants or huge sprinkler systems that maxed out the flow capacity of their installed meters.

"Basically, they were outrunning the meter," Bayne explains. "At a certain point, the meters just gave up and stopped measuring the water going through the pipe."

Meanwhile, in some cases runoff from unmetered irrigation was pooling around nearby roads, leading to reports that water lines were leaking. That forced Pioneer to conduct costly excavations to inspect underground infrastructure—even though the pipes themselves usually proved to be in perfect condition. "With just 350 active connections, budget is a huge issue for us," Bayne says. "We couldn't afford to have so much water going unbilled—and we certainly couldn't afford to spend thousands of dollars on unnecessary excavations."

Worst of all, Pioneer's previous meter vendor hadn't been interested in working to understand the community's needs. Bayne says her questions led to a whole lot of buck-passing and finger-pointing—but no real effort to help. "As a manager for a small system, getting relevant and honest information from metering providers, or even just getting accurate meter data, was pretty damn difficult," Bayne says.

## How Metron put things right

Fortunately, in 2023, Metron Regional Sales Manager Kevin Kosorok stopped by the Pioneer HQ, listened to Bayne's complaints—then offered to run a pilot project to see if cellular smart meters could solve the problem.

"I was impressed that Metron was willing to put skin in the game to demonstrate their technology," Bayne recalls. She agreed to let Metron install 29 meters on a single subdivision—and almost instantly, realized she'd found the solution she needed.

Metron's meters proved more robust and better equipped to keep pace with their rural users during high-use periods. With built-in temperature readings, Metron's meters also enabled Pioneer to proactively insulate meters that might otherwise have frozen up, avoiding damage and ensuring accurate readings all year round.

The biggest benefit, though, came from minute-by-minute flow data—beamed daily to Bayne's desk via the reliable cellular network—that made it possible for her and her water operators to see exactly where and how water was being used. "Suddenly, accessing data was easy," Bayne says. "The very next day, we could pull up WaterScope and see exactly



*"I was impressed that Metron was willing to put skin in the game"*

where the water was going.”

That enabled Pioneer to identify irrigation events in accurate detail, and make sure that meters were tracking water usage correctly. It also meant that suspected leaks could be checked against time-stamped flow data, eliminating the need for excavations and physical pipeline inspections.

“At one point, we had the county squawking at us, saying we’d damaged their road with a leak—but I was able to pull up WaterScope and show them that the master meter wasn’t running, so there was no way it could be our water,” Bayne says. “We were able to figure out where the leak was really happening—from irrigation!—and get it fixed without digging a single trench.”

### Metron’s meters save Pioneer money

Within three months of installing its first Metron meter, Pioneer decided to roll out Metron equipment across its entire service area. “That was in 2023, and in 2024—our first full year of using Metron—we saw our water losses fall by more than half,” Bayne says.

Today, water losses are holding steady at barely 3% even during the peak-use summer months, and Pioneer is saving thousands of dollars per year. “The really great thing is that this was strictly a metering solution—we didn’t need any changes in behavior from our end-users,” Bayne says.

Metron’s cellular connectivity has also proved a major advantage. With previous metering systems, field crews would drive the entire service area collecting data, which took four hours on a good day. “If the roads were bad, or the weather was bad, or there were snowdrifts over the meter pits, it might not work at all,” Bayne says. That meant additional expenses and administrative overhead—plus billing delays that inevitably took a toll on customer relationships.



Metron, on the other hand, delivers reliable data, enabling Pioneer to keep customers informed and satisfied. Even if customers’ bills increased once they were charged correctly for their consumption, Metron’s ability to provide clear usage data in real time ensured customers didn’t face any nasty surprises.

In fact, Bayne says, many customers felt empowered by the new visibility into where water was going—especially as Pioneer began using Metron data to proactively help customers fix leaks and take control of their water usage.

“From a customer service standpoint, it’s been pretty huge—we’ve been able to let people know that they have a leak, and help them get it fixed before it has a huge financial impact,” Bayne says. “Our operator gets up in the morning and makes his coffee and looks at WaterScope, and if there’s a new issue, he calls the customer and talks it over with them.”

## Making service a priority

Besides Metron's meters and WaterScope technology, Pioneer benefited from the company's commitment to providing best-in-class customer service. "With other providers, it was hard to trust them—the reps would give us bad information, or simply disappear on us," Bayne says. "But Kevin worked hard to understand our needs. Above all, he was honest: if there was something he didn't know, he'd tell us so—and go and find out."

One of the things that sets Metron apart, Kosorok says, is that it's a national player that has deliberately chosen to compete on service rather than volume. That means customers benefit from Metron's decades of experience installing and operating over 800,000 smart meters—but never feel like they're being taken for granted.

"Nobody ever gets left behind or neglected when they partner with Metron," Kosorok says. "We don't farm our business out to resellers—instead, we work each and every day to earn our customers' trust, and make sure that even the smallest utilities get the hands-on support and attention they deserve."

Because of that, Bayne says, rolling out Metron's devices across Pioneer's service area has been virtually hassle-free. Kosorok has stayed in touch, and taken personal responsibility for troubleshooting any problems that emerge. "If anything ever does go wrong, everyone's really responsive—there are never any excuses, they just figure out the problem and fix it."

For a small provider like Pioneer, that's priceless. "As a small utility, we don't always feel in control of our destiny," Bayne says. "But with Metron, there are no mysteries—they're always there for us, and the data is just there when we need it."

### Get in touch with Metron:

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