

ExploreMT Implementation

The Automated License System (ALS) is Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) core business system. The system was originally developed to automate the sale of hunting and fishing licenses at the agency's regional offices and license agents. When it was developed, ALS was at the leading edge of a movement towards electronic licensing systems among state fish and wildlife agencies across the country. With the hard work of staff, the usefulness and the life expectancy of the system was extended. After 19 years, the system has evolved into a data warehouse for fish, wildlife, and recreation information. Now, FWP is replacing ALS with a new agency-wide unified transaction system to both manage the core operations and implement future functionality.

After receiving approval to replace ALS during the 2019 session, FWP worked with stakeholders to gather all the requirements for the next system, ExploreMT or XMT. Stakeholders included the general public, FWP employees, license providers, and industry leaders (e.g., Montana Outfitter and Guides Association, Fishing Outfitters Association of Montana). Examples of requirements included: license sales tracking, an option for a digital carcass tag, and campsite reservations.

FWP, along with the State Procurement Bureau, put out a Request for Proposals (RFP). After honoring an extension request from vendors, we received several proposals in mid-February 2020. The evaluation committee had three weeks to review and score the proposals individually. FWP's response to COVID19 required the evaluation meeting to be rescheduled several times. FWP also faced a COVID19-related budget uncertainty that could impact the agency's account balance. Part of the paddlefish and spring bear seasons were both impacted by COVID19, and the department was issuing refunds on license purchases. Visitors to the state were required to quarantine for two weeks and this made recreating in the state difficult. FWP ultimately made the decision to cancel the RFP without awarding the contract to a vendor, as it was unfair to them to have an unclear path forward.

When the state reopened and FWP had a better feel for what the fall hunting season would look like, a smaller Contractor Engagement Proposal (CEP) was developed, using the information in the RFP. This first phase of XMT is focused on replacing ALS, and included the parts of the system that have the greatest eligibility to use federal funds (Pittman-Robertson (PR) and Dingell-Johnson (DJ)). Future phases will incorporate campsite reservations and event management.

The CEP responses were reviewed in December 2020 and we hope to have a contract in place in January 2021. The original timeline for using XMT to sell licenses by the end of 2021 for the 2022 license year is still in place.

