



USA SERVICES

USA Services: Helping Government Help Citizens by Answering Telephone Inquiries

Partner Agency: U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service

The Situation

In 1996, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service inaugurated its 1-800-344 WILD line to provide information about the National Wildlife Refuge System. By 2003, the number of calls had escalated to the point that it was becoming increasingly difficult for available FWS staff to respond in a timely fashion. A voice recorder helped, but sometimes callers hung up rather than leave a message. Also, the questions coming in to this line were no longer solely refuge-related. FWS had to devise a means by which public inquiries were handled in the professional and timely manner that FWS is known for.

How USA Services Helped:

In July 2003, the Fish and Wildlife Service began a six-month pilot to improve customer service and obtain baseline data about calls to the toll-free line and inquiries made. By the end of September, USA Services had fielded more than 25,000 calls and 1,000 e-mails. Fifty-eight percent of callers find answers to their questions using the interactive voice response system; topics in the database include basic information about wildlife refuges and endangered species. The remaining 42 percent of callers speak to USA Services call agents, who have been trained to answer routine questions on behalf of the Department of the Interior. In all, USA Services is able to respond directly to about 85 percent of the calls fielded by the service agents. The other 15 percent are transferred to the Fish and Wildlife Service for an expert response.

The Outcome:

Now all callers receive a response within minutes. Fish and Wildlife experts have been freed from answering routine questions and can respond more easily to complex questions that require their expertise. After four months of the pilot, Fish and Wildlife signed with USA Services to handle all of its phone calls through the end of Fiscal Year 2004. "USA Services helps us focus on our 4-C's mission—conservation through cooperation, consultation, and communication—especially with communication. . . . It works for us, and it will work for you," said Scott Cameron, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Performance and Management of the Interior.

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