



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
2015 NASCIO Nomination



Pennsylvania Automated Licensing System (PALS)

Category: Digital Government: Government to Citizen

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Executive Summary

The Pennsylvania Game Commission issues over 3 million recreational hunting and furtaking licenses and special use hunting permits each year to control the amount of huntable wildlife taken and to focus hunter and trapper pressure on specific areas where wildlife populations must be controlled to promote the sustainability of suitable habitat for wildlife and to minimize human/wildlife conflict interaction.

For most of the Commission's history, the licensing process had been manual and paper-based. The Commission spent \$800,000 annually printing booklets of licenses for approximately 900 issuing agents located across the state. The issuing agents had to report their sales back to the Commission and retain the booklets for recordkeeping purposes. In the event that a Game Commission officer had to retrieve an original license sales document for adjudication purposes, the officer would have to contact Game Commission headquarters to determine where the license was sold, and then travel to the location to review the license booklets on premise.

In 2006, the Game Commission partnered with the PA Fish and Boat Commission on a contract for a turn-key point-of-sale system. The bid was based upon the transaction fee the vendor would charge per applicable privilege. This approach eliminated the need for a large upfront investment to get the system up and running.

The PA Automated Licensing System (PALS) has transformed how the Commissions do business and how our customers do business with us. By automating this process, the time to purchase a new license was significantly reduced, and the wait time for returning customers was reduced even further.

In addition to eliminating the cost of printed booklets, the system has increased revenue through more accurate and timely reporting of license sales, streamlined the reporting process for issuing agents, enhanced the ability of the Commission to conduct enforcement, resulted in the creation of a comprehensive customer database, and streamlined data collection and reporting of wildlife harvests.

The PALS system has brought with it a level of flexibility we never had before with relation to license sales. For example, this year the Game Commission has been selected as one of five states to be added to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's approved list of states who may sell electronic waterfowl stamps. Prior to the implementation of PALS, PA could not have been considered for this project.

Business Problem and Solution

For over 100 years, the Game Commission has been issuing recreational licenses to control and promote the wildlife populations of Pennsylvania. For several decades the aggregate number of hunting and furtaking privileges issued on an annual basis has exceeded 3 million.

Each year the Commission shipped dozens of individual booklets of licenses and permits to our roughly 900 license issuing agents. These booklets contained multipart carbon forms that had to be completed by the agent and signed by the customer. Additionally, the agents had separate booklets for each different license type the Commission sold. These licenses were made of durable paper with the master backtag being made of a nearly indestructible Mylar material. As booklets of sales receipts were completed, the agent had to store that booklet on-premise and make them available for Commission inspection.

The cost to print all of the different license booklets on durable paper had reached \$800,000 annually. The Commission had to over-order license booklets to ensure there were enough to distribute to all our issuing agents without allowing any agent location to run out.

The booklets also presented challenges with regard to enforcement. In the event that a Game Commission officer had to retrieve an original license sales document for adjudication purposes, the officer would first have to know the backtag number of the license in question. Unless there was direct interaction with the individual who purchased that license, the backtag could not be determined. Once the officer had a backtag number, contact had to be made with the headquarters office to learn which issuing agent was given the booklet of general hunting licenses that contained that particular backtag number. The officer would then have to travel to the agent's location and request to go through the booklets of completed license sales the agent was to maintain. Even though the general backtag booklets were in numeric order, and a specific backtag number could be found in a short period of time, any additional licenses sold to the individual who purchased the license in question required the officer to rummage through all the completed booklets of sales for all other privileges such as bear licenses, furtaker licenses, migratory bird licenses, archery licenses, etc. In some cases this endeavor could take several days depending upon the number of licenses sold by the issuing agent.

In addition to our regular licenses sold by issuing agents, we had to purchase booklets of antlerless deer licenses, which can only be sold by Pennsylvania County Treasurers.

Applications to purchase these licenses have to be made by mail, which could be as many as one million pieces of mail based upon the antlerless license allocation. Prior to automating the sale of these licenses hunters had to mail their applications to the Game Commission and we in turn forwarded them to the county treasurers who could sell licenses for the hunter's preferred Wildlife Management Unit.

The implementation of PALS made it possible for any County Treasurer to sell an antlerless license for any management unit because PALS can print the management unit number on the antlerless license dynamically. Now hunters can mail their application to any County Treasurer. This put the Treasurers in competition with each other and sped up the processing of antlerless license applications.

In May 2006 the Game and Fish and Boat Commissions entered into a contract with Automated License Systems for a turn-key point-of-sale system. The bid was based upon the transaction fee the vendor would charge per applicable privilege. While the system was designed and configured and the agent equipment was disbursed and the agents were trained, our vendor did not receive a single penny in revenue. They were only paid once license sales began and then they were paid only for the number of licenses sold.

In order to make the system less burdensome on our agents, we selected a thermal printer for license printing. This eliminated the need to change ribbons, leaving only the rolls of specialized paper to be replaced as needed. Agents were also given their choice of sales platforms; a self-contained unit that included a Verifone terminal with integrated magnetic stripe reader, keyboard, and printer that uses either a high-speed Internet connection or a standard phone line; or, if the agent already had a PC in the area of their store where licenses were sold, they could use it with a printer, magnetic stripe reader, and pinpad device supplied by our POS vendor, along with their high-speed Internet connection. The magnetic stripe readers are used to extract data from the magnetic stripe on PA driver's licenses and the pinpads are used for the secure entry of Social Security Numbers (SSN) by customers. For agent locations using Verifone terminals, the terminal can be turned towards the customer to make SSN entry secure.

Following a successful pilot of the PALS system we implemented it state wide for recreational license and permit sales in 2010. After the initial implementation we continually added more features and enhancements to the system. These included: the acceptance of donations, boat registration renewals, on-line and telephone-based big game harvest reporting, preventing the sale of licenses to individuals who have violated the PA Game Law, are in arrears for child support, or have violated the game law of any

other state belonging to the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact, the sale of multi-year licenses, the sale of several new licenses and permits, and the sale of merchandise and magazine subscriptions. These additional components to the system were completed by late 2014.

Significance of the Project

The PALS project further promoted cooperation between the Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission. Through this agreement we were able to leverage our economies of scale to drive the transaction fee based bids down.

The implementation of PALS provided the Commissions with the means to improve the license buying experience of our respective constituencies. By automating this process, the time to purchase a new license was significantly reduced, and the wait time for returning customers was reduced even further. Additionally, the reporting of big game harvests was greatly simplified. Hunters now have three options for reporting a harvest including Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR), online, and the traditional mail-in card.

Several Pennsylvania state agencies and agencies from other states have expressed interest in the PALS system and the means by which we acquired it and our contract provisions. This has promoted relationships between the Game Commission and other PA agencies and other states. We now share experiences and documents that may be able to help us with our next point-of-sale procurement.

During the requirements gathering phase of this project we formed focus groups that included some County Treasurers, because they sell all of our antlerless licenses, a cross section of our commercial issuing agents from the “big box” stores to the local mom and pop shops, and representatives from the community of sportsmen. By doing so we further opened our lines of communication with these groups and we listened to what they had to say concerning license buying and acted upon their suggestions.

The PALS implementation has also promoted enhanced relations between the Commissions and our legislature. Lawmakers were pleased that we were improving the license buying experience for their constituents. Since the Game Commission has not had a license fee increase since 1999, the legislature passed a bill that allowed us to pass our negotiated transaction fee on to our customers. This saved the agency a significant amount of money and highlighted our fiscal situation.

Benefits of the Project

Cost Savings

By implementing the PALS system we have avoided the \$800,000 annual cost of printing our traditional license booklets.

Increased Revenue

When our license sales system was manual, agents were only required to report their sales to us once each month. We suspect that many agents under reported their sales so they could hold money from license sales for their own use until the end of the license year. When we implemented PALS, we required each agent to remit the amount they owed us each week. This allowed us to collect large amounts of money much earlier in the license year. The first year of implementation we realized an increase in revenue of \$1.1 million from the additional interest we earned on that money.

Streamlined Reporting of License Sales

The PALS system also greatly reduced the time it takes an agent and the Commission to calculate the amount of money owed each week. Prior to the PALS implementation, large agents could spend up to three days preparing their sales reports. Now, sales reports are literally available at the touch of a button. Should an agent have a discrepancy with a sales report, we have two days built into the bank account sweeping process in which to rectify the issue, or if need be, we can drop specific agents from the weekly funds transfer to allow more time for fixing a problem.

Enhanced Enforcement

With an electronic database of license buyers, our officers can now inquire on license holders from our regional offices, their home offices, or from their vehicles. When data service is not available, they can still inquire on license holders by calling our point-of-sale vendor's helpdesk. What used to take them days to research now takes minutes.

Customer Data and Insights

Through PALS, the commission has realized its goal of creating a master database of our constituents. This database has given us insight into the age of our constituency, where they live, where they purchase their licenses, how many belong to hunting families, where they hunt versus where they live, etc. We have been able to conduct dozens of surveys directed at randomly selected individuals and individuals who meet specific criteria. This database has also been used as the cornerstone for a data mining project we are conducting in conjunction with Penn State University.

More Accurate and Efficient Wildlife Harvest Reporting

With the implementation of the harvest reporting modules, we have realized a significant savings in our cost to process mail-in reports and improved the accuracy of that data.

Prior to electronic reporting, we received approximately 300,000 paper harvest cards in the mail each year. We had to handle each individual card, looking for omissions and errors, and then pass the completed cards on to a data entry contractor. Today we have reduced that number to about 150,000 cards, have the data from the reports that are entered electronically by the hunters in a more timely fashion, have more accurate data from the Internet and IVR reports, and have final tallies and reports sooner. Our future plan is to make harvest reporting available through smart devices, hoping to reduce the number of physical cards we have to handle even more.

Increased Flexibility

The PALS system has brought with it a level of flexibility we never had before with relation to license sales. For example, this year the Game Commission has been selected as one of five states to be added to the US Fish and Wildlife Service's approved list of states who may sell electronic waterfowl stamps. Prior to the implementation of PALS, PA could not have been considered for this project. Now, we just gather the requirements for the electronic waterfowl stamp and create a new privilege in the system.