

Less Turf + Less Water = Less Cost

Preparing a turf assessment plan can help find ways to save.

BY MARK FINE AND FORREST RICHARDSON

Superintendents across the country are under pressure to reduce costs, yet at the same time not sacrifice playing conditions. Though you can't draw blood from a stone, there are ways to overcome this course maintenance dilemma, and one of them is to reduce turf. While it sounds simple, reducing areas of managed turf and, in turn, reducing water use are often overlooked by courses when it is necessary to trim operating costs. The reason is often a concern for aesthetics, strategy, and pace of play, all of which are crucial considerations. To address these concerns, some courses are utilizing what my colleague Forrest Richardson and I call a "Turf Assessment Plan" (TAP) to get at the heart of the issue and answer the questions, "Can we responsibly reduce turf . . . and how much money will it save us?"

We sometimes prepare a TAP as part of an overall master plan. Long-range plans are essential to all golf facilities, even those that are relatively new. A roadmap for the future can save thousands of dollars, as courses make emergency repairs, capital expenditures, and planning decisions.

Most TAPs include three primary components: 1) An evaluation of areas that potentially can be removed from managed turf, but with careful planning for playability, pace of play, and irrigation integration. 2) Landscape solutions for treating areas after removal of turf. 3) A cost analysis. The investment for a TAP is generally a fraction of the cost of a full master plan.

SAVINGS ASSOCIATED WITH TURF REDUCTION

- Less mowing and turf care.
- Less fertilization.
- Less water use.



This design at The Hideout Golf Club in Utah employs native areas strategically set to create interest, yet reduce the overall turf area without negatively affecting pace of play. Photo by Mike Houska, courtesy of Forrest Richardson & Assoc.

- Less pumping cost.
- Less irrigation maintenance and capital expense.
- Reduced areas of drainage concern.
- Reduced areas of seasonal debris.

SOME ASSOCIATED BENEFITS

- Improved visual definition of holes.
- Better tree health.
- Environmental stewardship.
- Better aesthetics.
- Enhanced strategy.

In addition to turf reduction, superintendents can save thousands of dollars in costs with modified mowing practices such as limiting themselves

to four cutting heights: greens, tees/approaches (with a riding mower), fairways, and one height of cut for the rough. Also, adjusting maintenance practices for hazards can dramatically reduce costs.

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