

BLOWING YOUR TOP!

by **LARRY GILHULY**
Director, Western Region, USGA Green Section

DYNAMITE. The mere mention of the word evokes thoughts of destruction. Even worse is the thought of destroying native habitat that is often home to many different forms of wildlife. Although this destructive material often symbolizes man's movement into natural areas, it can also be used in unique and positive ways to actually develop better nesting areas for various forms of wildlife. Such is the case at The Oregon Golf Club in West Linn, Oregon.

While viewing a program on television, golf course superintendent John Anderson was intrigued by a method used by Pacific Habitat & Fire during the past decade to increase nesting sites in the forests of Oregon. Through the use of explosives, dead tree habitat (primarily on green trees) and snags are created that benefit many different bird species. Large green conifers are nearly always used to accomplish this goal. The tree top takes on a very natural and jagged look. With a splintered top, more moisture can accumulate in the damaged part of the tree, allowing the decay process to begin. Compared to a dead tree, which could blow down as its roots and main trunk decay, the newly created live habitat tree will stand for a much longer period of time.

The treetop blasting methods used today involve, first, boring a circular hole into the tree at the desired blast height. This creates a place for the technician to insert an internal charge. Varying amounts of explosives are used, depending on the size of the tree at the blast point. This system also involves the use of an electric blasting cap to detonate the charge. Experience in doing this type of work is critical. The objective is to use just the right amount of explosives, allowing the top to break free, tip over, and fall away cleanly. Tree diameters at the blast point can be anywhere from 6 to 48 inches. Climbing heights can vary from 20 to 120 feet.

The benefits of creating this type of habitat are wide-reaching. During the tree's declining process, the bark is invaded by bugs and grubs. This provides a food source for many types of woodpeckers that feed on these insects. When the snag is at a certain stage of decay, primary cavity excavators will make holes for use as nest sites to raise



The use of explosives keeps the hazard in play while providing natural habitat.



Explosives result in a natural, jagged top that enhances nesting sites for several species of birds.

their young. All woodpeckers are considered primary cavity excavators. Each spring, woodpeckers abandon old nest sites and excavate new ones as part of their mating rituals. This paves the way for what is referred to as secondary cavity nesters. Since these birds cannot excavate their own holes, they simply take up nest sites abandoned by the primary cavity excavators. Examples of these birds are the tree swallows, nuthatches, pygmy owls, and kestrel falcons.

The Oregon Golf Club is located several hundred feet above the Willamette River, with spectacular views of the Cascade Range. Due to the close proximity of the course to the river, the existence of numerous Douglas firs, and an ongoing commitment to enhance wildlife habitat, Superintendent Anderson decided to try this idea on the golf course.

Two large Douglas firs that had died on the golf course presented a good place to launch the new project. These trees were strategic to the play of the fifth hole, so the decision was made to create natural looking, 30-foot-high snags. The process took approximately two hours for preparation, detonation, and cleanup. The best part is that the cost was minimal when compared to complete tree removal.

A second site was located behind the No. 9 tee, in a forested area within a quarter mile of the Willamette River. The top of a 100-foot Douglas fir was taken down using the same procedure. Since ospreys frequent the area, a platform was constructed with careful attention given to maintaining perching limbs 5 to 6 feet below the platform. Again, the cost was minimal, and, best of all, the tree is within view of the clubhouse for future

observation. Hopefully, an osprey pair will utilize the nest site within the next year.

As a final note, The Oregon Golf Club is a fully certified cooperative sanctuary within the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program administered by the Audubon Society of New York State. Superintendent Anderson practices some of the finest IPM programs found in the Pacific Northwest. To his credit, only \$1,100 was spent on pesticides during 1994. Although pest pressures are relatively low in this area of the country, reduced pesticide usage should be the goal of all superintendents.

The use of dynamite may seem extreme; however, it has worked very well in Oregon and at The Oregon Golf Club. Perhaps the next time a "tree hugger" takes you to task, the best response may be to simply "blow your top"!

Power Drainage for Healthier Turf

No Slope? No Drainage? No Problem!

by **CHUCK GAST**

Former Agronomist, State of Florida, USGA Green Section

IF YOU HAVE isolated low areas at your facility where the lack of outfall prevents the use of standard gravitational flow drainage systems, here is a viable solution to your problems.

Thanks to an affordable forced drainage system devised by Walt Oswiany, CGCS, of the Audubon Country Club of Naples, Florida, your problems of not being able to effectively drain low areas on your course are over.

Walt has developed a drainage system involving a series of standard french drains, lined and filled with stone, connected to a large sump basin, equipped with a pump, to move excess water up and out of problem drainage areas.

This power drainage system is a welcome addition to Walt Oswiany's overall golf course management operation.

