

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT

Participation in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program can help superintendents make golf courses into environmental assets.

by PETER V. LEUZINGER, CGCS



Any decision made in managing the golf course impacts the environment.

GOLF COURSE superintendents began their careers for many reasons, one of which was environmental stewardship. We didn't call it that years ago, but we knew we liked working outdoors with Mother Nature. Along the way some troubling things happened to some of us. In the mid-'80s, groups of people began to accuse golf courses and the industry at large of being harmful to the environment. This perception was the complete opposite of how most superintendents viewed their work. We did not handle the criticism very well, and we hoped it would go away. This was not to be, as the criticism grew stronger in the early '90s.

Golf course superintendents who experienced that period learned to deal

with all kinds of problems, including criticism of our industry's environmental inadequacies. Environmental audits, conservation seminars, and the Audubon Program were the learning tools that helped develop new industry leaders. We learned to stand up for our environmental commitment. We had to lead by example. For me, involvement with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP) gave me the confidence I needed to look a critic in the eye and convince him or her that I was an ally of the environmental movement. Educated golf course superintendents from all over the country got actively involved with the ACSP and have found themselves in leadership positions in the commonwealth of environmental steward-

ship. Where we were once criticized, golf course superintendents are now depended upon to lend their expertise in land management and use for their communities.

To date, more than 2,300 golf courses across North America are participating in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, and more than 110 golf courses are fully certified in the program. Golf course superintendents who are fully certified understand the basic fact that any management decision they make is going to impact the environment. We have been trained to understand the many benefits derived from this new decision-making process. These benefits include:

- Increased natural habitat and attraction of wildlife.



Taking a natural approach to bunker surrounds can reduce inputs and save money.

- Decreased chemical budgets and inventory.
- Decreased water use.
- Better pond and stream water quality.
- Increased property value.
- Improved employee training.
- Increased use of native plant material in landscaping.
- Reduced high-maintenance areas.
- Increased professional value to your course.
- Increased professional job satisfaction.

Once certification has been achieved, the next real challenge is maintaining that same degree of excitement and dedication to a follow-up program of recertification. I have found that maintaining environmental dedication requires some motivational discipline. I do it by focusing on the following objectives.

- Rereading my original environmental plan.
- Reviewing goals in each ACSP category of certification.
- Setting new goals and expanding projects.
- Promoting the program to golfers, peers, employees, and the public.

- Calling Audubon staff or your State Steward and sharing ideas.

- Recertifying every two years.

It is very important to periodically review the original goals that you set when you wrote your first environmental plan. Don't be afraid to re-evaluate those early objectives, because after a couple of years with the program, you will have learned a lot and will probably want to make changes for the better. I get excited about expanding programs. That is what keeps me going. Usually this involves getting people from various factions together to see what the golf course and the ACSP is all about. Every year we try to expand and/or modify the program. This expansion can do simple things like:

- Updating the club's Audubon brochure.
- Adding to or changing nest box locations.
- Writing an article for the local newspaper or soliciting a reporter to write a perspective on the course.
- Purchasing new and larger quantities of native plant material.
- Talking enthusiastically about the program to *anyone* with whom you come in contact.

What keeps our program alive and growing? I think it is our own enthusiasm sparked by feedback from the club members and community residents who have noticed the impact of the ACSP. People admire the changes that have taken place and now realize that this golf course is an asset to the community. To sum it all up, it's nice to get credit instead of criticism!



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