

# The First Step in an Environmental Plan

*Before you start improving environmental conditions on your course, it's a good idea to begin with a map of the property.*

by MARY COLLEEN LIBURDI

**Y**OU ARE JUST starting to take a good look at the management plans you have in place for the golf course. The idea of making a commitment to manage this property in the most environmentally sensitive way possible not only seems like the right thing to do, but also makes sense from economic and community-relations standpoints. So where is the best place to start? Well, developing a *plan of action* is certainly the first step. One of the best ways to accomplish this step is to make an assessment of the land you are managing. To make that assessment as thorough and comprehensive as possible, you will want to make a map of your property.

Mapping the golf course helps you comprehend the relationship of one land feature to another, seasonal land use, traffic patterns, plant species, and what natural resources are used and how they are used. Mapping your property provides you with a record of how the property is managed now, and provides a guideline of how it should be managed for the future.

The first step in making a map is preparing yourself mentally. Consider what you are trying to accomplish with the long-range management of the course. Take a walk on the golf course, but this time walk it with a different set of eyes and a more specific set of goals. The most important rule in making a map is to recognize that you are recording specific elements with particular goals in mind. When you walk the golf course, observe features of the land that you may not have noticed before. The reason for this is simple: you now have a defined set of goals in mind. Maybe you want to reduce the amount of water used on your course. It could be that you want to increase the numbers of wildlife that make their home on the golf course. Perhaps you have pest problems or isolated dry areas that require changed traffic patterns. All of these concerns become part of your visual assessment of the property.

Just as land is used on a seasonal basis, a map also should reflect the seasonal nature of the way it is used. In preparing your map, consider using overlays that reflect seasonal land use changes. The ability to look at your land at various times of the year can make a difference in management goals. For example, land use in the winter is very strong in southern and western states, but slows considerably at other times of the year. For the North and Midwest, just the opposite is true. Overlays of seasonal land use can assist you in making solid decisions about how you manage the land year round, as well as help record successes and failures from season to season. Most of all, this information will help you learn from practical experience.

To start making your map, take a notebook with you as you make your visual assessment of the golf course. Write down specific features of the property, such as different plants, land features, evidence of wildlife, places where natural lands meet fairways or other parts of the golf course, and all water features. Note areas that seem to get the most traffic and also note areas that are left in solitude. All of these notations will be important in making your goals a success in the future.

If you have an aerial map or another map already available, use it as a starting foundation. Trace over the existing map and make an outline of the main features. After the outline is complete, begin adding the features that you recorded during the visual assessment. You do not have to be a great artist. The map is to serve as a guide for developing the land management plan, and being able to juxtapose one feature or detail next to another is the goal.

You may decide that adding color helps define areas of water from vegetation or naturalized areas. You may even want to designate areas that have the highest amount of play in one color.

Once you have the basic features added, you will be able to get a real

feeling for how certain traffic patterns and land uses can impact wildlife, natural resource consumption, and even the amount of labor needed to manage the property. At this point, you can compare your list of goals to the environmental plan and make some concrete decisions for the year.

Overlays for different seasons can be made on acetate or tracing paper and laid over the map for comparison. Overlays are particularly handy when deciding on adding new features such as no-mow areas or buffer zones. Using the overlay, you can see where it falls on the property and how it might impact play or the other environmental stewardship projects.

Archiving your maps with dates and seasons provides an excellent record of stewardship activities and a permanent record of accomplishments. The maps also can assist in budgeting from one year to the next and assist in developing plans based on real trends and patterns found in these important documents.

Remember, mapping the property is an important tool to help plan your environmental and land management decisions for today and the future of the golf course. Once the initial map is made, this valuable process takes a minimal amount of time but reaps boundless benefits to ensure success in sound land management. Whether you stick with pencil and a notebook or add seasonal overlays, the mapping process is integral in setting a solid foundation for all your stewardship decisions.

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MARY COLLEEN LIBURDI was the *Communications Director for Audubon International, a not-for-profit environmental organization dedicated to issues of sustainable resource management. Audubon International manages the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses and the Audubon International Signature Program.*