

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

HOW "GREEN" IS YOUR COURSE?

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THE ANSWER TO THIS question depends on how you define the word *green*. But first, let me tell you what today's politically correct answer should be. Today's courses ought to be very *green*, yet not so very *green*, both at the same time!

Confused? Let's look at a couple of definitions of the word *green*, and perhaps the previous statement will become more clear. First of all, environmentalists use the word *green* to identify organizations, people, corporations, policies, etc., as being environmentally friendly. Unfortunately, few of these environmental people or groups use the word *green* when referring to golf courses. On the other hand, golfers and others refer to the color of their golf courses as being *green*. Sometimes they refer to their courses as being *lush green*, a comment that suggests turf of a very dark green color and density, and one that receives a high degree of pampering.

Actually, the term *lush green* makes me cringe. It makes me think of turf that receives too much water and fertilizer, primarily for the sake of appearance. It suggests turf that is very pretty to look at but that is weak, poorly rooted, susceptible to diseases and insects, and likely to keel over at the first sign of hot weather. It also suggests turf that is of poor playing quality, characterized by lack of firmness and susceptibility to plugging and large divots. This type of turf requires frequent watering and regular applications of fertilizer and pesticides to keep it going. It's bad for the playing of the game of golf, and it's bad for the environment.

Having seen the two perspectives on the word *green*, can you see how it is advantageous to have a golf course that is both very *green* (environmentally) and not so very *green* (*lush*)?

There are very few people who keep track of what's going on in the world of golf who don't realize the importance of environmental issues as they relate to the future of the game of golf. Simply put, issues relating to water use, potential pollution from fertilizer and pesticide use, loss of threatened species and natural habitat, and effects of golf courses on wildlife all threaten to stall the development of new golf facilities and severely affect the quality of existing facilities.

Many people also realize that the game of golf has responded to these important issues in many different ways. For example, the USGA has spent more than \$8 million over the past 10 years on research to develop new grasses for golf that use less water and require less pesticide use, and to investigate the effects of golf course activities on the environment. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) has instituted a variety of environmental educational programs for its members, and other organizations have responded with educational publications and programs.

Not enough people realize, however, that *everyone* needs to play a part in resolving golf's environmental issues if the game is to continue to flourish. Golf course superintendents are the most important people in the game of golf when it comes to putting the environmental *green* into the game, and whereas many superintendents have responded in an admirable fashion, too many others have not.

In my opinion, an ideal program has been established to assist every golf course to do good things for the environment and, in the process, to do good things for the game of golf—the **Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses**. Administered by the Audubon Society of

New York State and funded by the USGA, the program can help educate superintendents, course officials, and golfers about the issues, and at the same time can make the public more aware of the environmentally responsible activities of golf courses.

I'm pleased to say that nearly 900 golf courses have signed up for the program. It's exciting to see how hundreds of these courses have enthusiastically developed and implemented conservation programs, and that many have become certified in one or more of seven different categories established by New York Audubon. Yet I'm concerned about the many courses that are not doing their share for golf and the environment. Too many courses maintain the *lush green* look that compromises turf playability and suggests to those outside the game of golf that golf courses are environmentally irresponsible. Superintendents must work to take the *lush* out of the game, and course officials must lend their support by rejecting the heavy-handed use of water, fertilizer, and pesticides required to obtain that extra degree of dark green color.

So what can you do? Begin by committing your golf course to an environmentally *green* maintenance program. Participate in environmental education programs—begin to think with an environmental mindset. Develop a written set of Best Management Practices, and establish an IPM program for your course. If you have not done so already, join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, and follow through with their advice and recommendations. Convince neighboring courses to participate as well. For information about the program, call the Audubon Society of New York State at (518) 767-9051.

Do your part. Let's make sure golf is (environmentally) *GREEN*.