

The Best Turf Tips of 1995

YOU CAN BANK ON IT!

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SOIL EROSION around bodies of water is a common problem on golf courses. The situation can be greatly exacerbated by golfers' demands to find their golf balls easily, necessitating continual close mowing of bank areas. Traditional methods of remediation include channelization techniques such as the installation of rip-rap, masonry structures, or the like, but these can be both expensive and disruptive to install. It also may be difficult to obtain the necessary permits, and channelization does not always solve the problem. In some cases, it may actually cause increased erosion downstream by altering water currents and increasing water velocity.

Fortunately, I have observed an inexpensive solution at several golf courses that has proven amazingly effective. This is a solution that saves labor and money, and it can be accomplished in an attractive and environmentally sound manner. The answer? **Stop mowing!**

The two best examples of stream bank stabilization through the use of vegetation I have observed are at the Springdale Golf Club in Princeton, New Jersey, and Islington Golf Club in Islington, Canada. Superintendents Charles Dye and Wayne Rath, respec-

tively, were successful in convincing their members to try this simple technique, and the results have been overwhelmingly positive.

Both courses were experiencing serious erosion problems that would have required expensive, large-scale stabilization projects. For Islington Golf Club, the cost easily could have been more than a million dollars, so the golfers were very receptive to this low-cost alternative. Their experiment began in the spring of 1993, after the winter's harsh weather caused severe erosion. The practice of mowing the creek bank with weed eaters was curtailed at that time. Noxious weeds were controlled on a spot basis with herbicides, and the existing vegetation was allowed to grow naturally.

The program met with such success that it was expanded upon the following year. In 1994, approximately 5,000 blue lime grass plants (*Elymus glaucus*) were planted in the areas most prone to erosion. Due to the increased health and density of the vegetation along the stream bank, the practice now is to cut the more vigorously growing areas back to a 1-foot height once or twice a season.

Superintendent Rath estimates that this program has resulted in an annual labor sav-

ings of approximately 300 man-hours. Where they once required 10 weed eaters to keep up with the work, they now require only one. Rath also reports that golfer complaints are virtually nonexistent, and erosion problems during the last two seasons have been negligible.

Superintendent Dye tells a similar story. Close mowing of their creek bank halted in the spring of 1993 in several of the lesser-played areas. One newsletter article and several meetings quelled most golfer complaints. The following spring, mowing was curtailed in an important and highly visible area in front of the clubhouse. Dye reports that no measurable erosion has occurred since the program was initiated, and annual labor savings are conservatively estimated at 160 man-hours.

Allowing vegetation to grow helps slow water flow, protects banks from scouring, filters out sediment, and lowers water temperatures. Beneficial habitat is also created. The taller vegetation can provide a lovely naturalizing feature that can improve aesthetics, but there is a downside: The longer vegetation can also trap golf balls, and this is why it can be a very controversial program. The program should not be undertaken without a carefully thought-out publicity campaign. It is critical to inform the golfers what to expect, and to provide them with the rationale behind the idea **before the vegetation begins to grow**. After all, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," and what may appear as a lovely naturalized stream bank to some will to others undoubtedly look like an unkempt, weedy mess caused by laziness. Slide presentations, newsletter articles, and tasteful signage on the golf course are all good ideas. Be sure to emphasize the positive results and do not be afraid to make concessions in areas where playability is a problem. Allowing for longer vegetation also may alter how a hazard is marked, so be sure to discuss this possibility with a qualified Rules official.

This solution may not be appropriate in every situation on every golf course, but the idea is so simple and effective that it surely deserves consideration. After all, this truly is a solution you can bank on!

Allowing vegetation to grow naturally is an attractive and cost-effective solution to erosion problems.

