



Congressional Country Club's vegetative buffers around water bodies serve to filter runoff and reduce erosion while increasing the visual appeal of the course. All shorelines that are not in the direct line of play have been naturalized.

On Course *With Nature*

Congressional Country Club Hosts the Wild and the Open

A notable course does great things for the environment.

BY JOSHUA CONWAY

The Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland, was established in 1924 to provide a recreational space where legislators and businessmen could meet informally. The concept was innovative even by today's standards and allowed the country club to host names such

as Hoover, Coolidge, Harding, Taft, Firestone, Carnegie, and Chrysler.

In the years since, the country club continues to make history in tournament golf. In June 2011, 56 players will compete at Congressional, as it plays host to its third U.S. Open Championship. For the past four years, staff from

the United States Golf Association and Congressional have worked tirelessly to reinvent the Blue Course and make it even better than the 1997 Open.

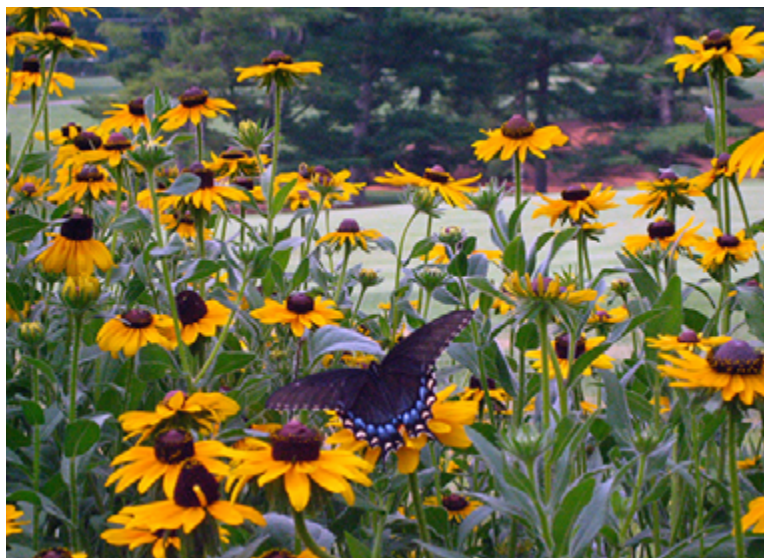
Since 1991, Congressional staff have also been working with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ASCP).



Aquatic plantings were introduced in and around ponds in 2005. These plants provide food and shelter for wildlife as well as control runoff and erosion.



The native grasses on the slope to the right of the tees on 10 Blue have provided critical erosion control.



Gardens are maintained to encourage birds and native pollinators.

Under the guidance of a steering committee and Audubon International staff, Congressional set out to enhance the natural areas and wildlife habitats that the Blue and Gold courses provide, while improving efficiency and minimizing potentially harmful operational impacts. Recently, as a result of their efforts, Congressional Country Club was designated a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by Audubon International.

The ACSP is an education and certification program that helps golf courses protect the environment, preserve the natural heritage of the game of golf, and gain recognition for their efforts. The ACSP assists each golf course member to take stock of its environmental resources and any potential liabilities, and then develop a plan that fits its unique setting, goals, staff, budget, and time. Audubon International awards certification to recognize golf courses that meet the environmental management standards outlined in their environmental plans. Certification demonstrates a course's leadership, commitment, and high standards of environmental management.

CONSERVING WATER

Water is perhaps the most valuable natural resource to any golf course, and courses are often criticized for the large amounts of water they use as a part of their turf care operations. Congressional Country Club recognizes the need to conserve and has given priority to water conservation. Congressional has also adopted a "Firm and Fast" philosophy for the playability of their golf courses. A centralized computer collects moisture and other information from soil probes in the tees, fairways, and greens. Based on this information, staff determine watering needs and ensure efficient irrigation. "Our firm-and-fast philosophy has helped prepare our courses for the National Championship while also benefiting the environment," states Dave Hutchinson, superintendent of greens and grounds for Congressional Country Club.

The Greens and Grounds Department has also replaced turfed areas of *Poa annua* and ryegrass with more

drought- and disease-tolerant species like creeping bentgrass and turf-type tall fescue. Vegetative buffers have been installed around most of the water bodies to filter runoff and reduce erosion. In 2005, two bio-retention areas were also installed to capture and filter runoff before it leaves the property.

PROTECTING WILDLIFE

To involve members and increase course appeal, Congressional Country Club began a bluebird nest box project shortly after joining the ACSP. Unfortunately the initial boxes were not visible to golfers and interest quickly waned. However, in 2001 the staff set out to provide shelter for bluebirds in locations that would make them visible to golfers and get members involved in the building, monitoring, and maintenance of the nest boxes. The project was a great success! Thus far, members have assembled, installed, and monitored 12 nest boxes. Each box had at least one brood, and over 75 fledglings were recorded.



The Greens and Grounds Department, in conjunction with the Junior Golf Program, conduct educational tours with the junior golfers as a way to create awareness about the environmental benefits of golf courses.



Oriental bittersweet, a highly invasive plant, is an ongoing issue in the understory of the wooded areas. Mechanical removal combined with judicious herbicide use and establishment of native plants is helping to keep this and other invasive plants under control.

To further enhance wildlife habitat, the Greens and Grounds Department has established native grass and wildflower stands throughout the golf course to provide food and shelter for songbirds, insects, and small mammals. Brush piles in undisturbed areas also provide shelter for small mammals utilizing these wildlife corridors. Congressional Country Club is actively communicating with members to highlight the environmental benefits of their courses by conducting wildlife tours and posting signs in protected habitat areas. Dave goes on to say, "We have always been proud of our magnificent property located just outside the Capitol Beltway. It is our goal to provide a safe habitat for native wildlife to thrive right on the doorstep to the "Most Powerful City in the World."

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

The staff and members of Congressional Country Club should be proud of their achievements. Not only have they maintained and improved such a prestigious course that is ranked among the top 100 golf courses

Environmental Stewardship Highlights at Congressional Country Club

- Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses Member since 1991.
- Designated as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary on May 12, 2011.

WILDLIFE

- A bluebird nest box program was initiated in the spring of 2000. Seventeen bluebird nest boxes on the property have led to a substantial increase in the bluebird population on the property. Members of the Woman's Golf Association are particularly fond of this program and have contributed to nest box monitoring.
- Brush piles in undisturbed areas provide shelter for small mammals.
- Native grass and wildflower stands have been established around the golf courses. They are mowed once a year in the late fall/early winter to minimize shrub growth. These areas provide shelter for wildlife and erosion control.
- Oriental bittersweet, a highly invasive plant, is an ongoing issue in the understory of the wooded areas. Mechanical removal, combined with judicious herbicide use and establishment of native plants, is helping to keep this and other invasive plants under control.
- A number of wildlife gardens throughout the course provide food and shelter for songbirds, beneficial insects, and small mammals.

WATER

- Over the years, the Greens and Grounds Department (GGD) has reduced turf species such as *Poa annua* and ryegrass and replaced them with more drought- and disease-tolerant varieties such as creeping bentgrass and turf-type tall fescue.
- The irrigation system is controlled by a centralized computer, which allows the GGD to micromanage the watering practice and ensure the efficient distribution of water to all areas needing irrigation.
- Soil probes and soil moisture sensors constantly monitor highly maintained turf areas such as tees, fairways, and greens. Staff determine watering needs of the turf based on this technological information.
- In 2005, along with the driving range renovation, two bio-retention areas were installed to capture and filter runoff from the golf courses before it leaves the property.
- Vegetative buffers were established around the majority of ponds and streams to prevent runoff and reduce erosion. Overall pond management is handled by outsourced professionals who specialize in environmentally sensitive water quality management.

OUTREACH

- The Greens and Grounds Department, in conjunction with the Junior Golf Program, conducts educational tours with the junior golfers as a way to create awareness about the environmental benefits of golf courses.
- Congressional Country Club's website has a page dedicated to their Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program efforts. www.auduboninternational.org
- Monthly newsletters to the membership include environmental information.
- A dedicated display board is located in the clubhouse at the pro shop entrance. Informational posters displayed on this board are updated as needed.
- Signs throughout the course highlight protected areas.



The bluebird nest box program at Congressional Country Club has been very successful and provides a way for golfers to get involved with environmental stewardship efforts around the golf course.

in the United States (*Golf Digest*) and hosted several elite golf tournaments, but they are striving to do all that with the least impact on the environment. Congressional Country Club joins over 800 golf courses throughout the world working with Audubon International through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. The concept of truly sustainable golf is difficult to fully envision, but with the continued involvement and leadership of courses like Congressional Country Club, it becomes a little clearer.

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