

BUDDY UP

Reduce single rider golf cart use to improve turf health and quality.

BY BUD WHITE



A fivesome using five individual carts is an example of unnecessary wear damage to the turf and soil compaction that often requires additional resources to correct.

There is no doubt golf carts have been a major component of the golf industry in the U.S. for many years and probably always will be. In fact, many golf facilities could not survive without revenue generated from golf cart rentals. However, we know there is a detrimental side to golf cart traffic, predominantly increased turf wear and soil compaction. And it is not just routine traffic patterns that are

the problem, because players seem to be so much more liberal in where they drive carts. I have observed instances where golfers will drive a golf cart where they typically would not venture with a four-wheel drive vehicle. With all this said, there is a relatively new issue with golf carts that needs to be addressed.

In the last four or five years, there seems to have been a significant

increase in golfers using carts as singles. During Turf Advisory Service visits to golf facilities, I frequently see a foursome of players using four carts or fivesomes with five carts. I have even observed married couples playing together using four private golf carts. When I asked each group why they chose to do this, the common response is, "It is too difficult to move my stuff to another cart."

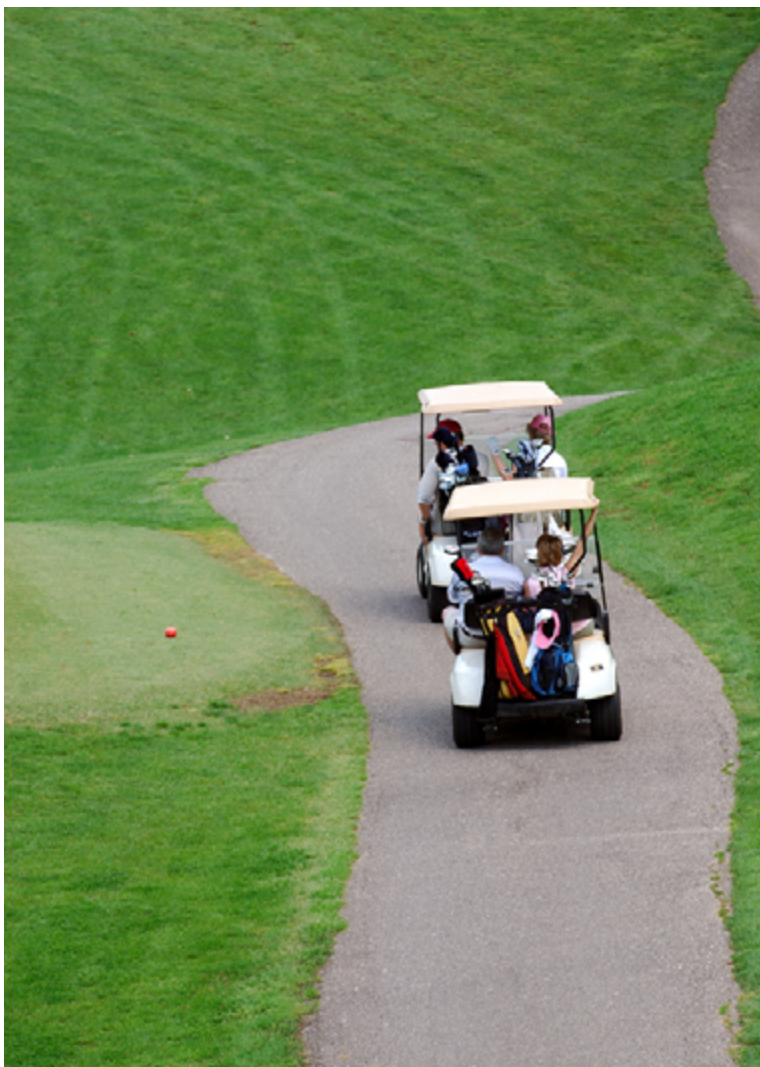
This is not just a trend with private carts, but also with the rental fleet from a golf facility as well. One facility shared with me that they received 24,000 rounds of golf the previous year, which should equate to about 9,000 cart rounds. However, they received so much single-cart usage that they estimated approximately 18,000 golf cart rounds, or double what was expected from a practical standpoint of cart usage. The point of this example is that every unnecessary golf cart on the course adds unnecessary wear and compaction to the golf course.

Additional wear and compaction are best addressed by cart use guidelines designed to balance the ratio of rounds to rounds with carts. Some facilities that allow private carts require golfers to double up in carts when playing. This has been very effective. Other courses charge a trail fee for private cart use that is substantial enough to fund additional aeration, seeding/sodding, and fertilization in fairways and roughs needed in response to the added traffic. This should be a decision by each course for the good of the golf course.

Golf facilities that allow rampant single-cart usage from the cart fleet would be wise to put restrictions on this type of usage right away to eliminate additional turfgrass wear and soil compaction. Such restrictions should be managed through the golf shop and closely monitored to prevent threesomes with three carts and foursomes with four carts. To be successful, this effort must be supported by course officials.

Golfers rarely realize or understand the amount of wear and damage that can be caused by golf cart traffic. In

the southern U.S., this is especially true in the spring when bermudagrass greens up and golfers immediately expect the density and quality of the surface to improve. This cannot happen until weather warms to the point that active bermudagrass growth fully resumes. Reducing cart rounds in the spring would improve fairway conditions



significantly and often produces quality turf three to four weeks earlier.

If decreasing single-rider usage is a daunting task at your course, you should at least explain the advantage of keeping carts on paths near tees and greens. Take a look at the picture of a fivesome with five carts parked near the green. Three of the five carts are pulled off the path onto the turf where they all stay “grouped” together. If all carts would stay on the path at greens and tees, this alone would re-

duce wear and damage that additional cart traffic imposes. For this reason, drivers should be encouraged to keep all four tires on the path at all times near greens and tees. This too is a program that should be implemented and monitored by the golf shop. In my experience, golfers are very good about supporting cart usage guidelines

when explained the details of what the programs are and how they enhance the golf course. Another helpful exercise is to restrict cart usage on a particular hole or two and then monitor the improvement to the rough and fairway on these holes as compared to others. This quickly shows the visual impact cart traffic can have on turf and playing quality in these areas.

Golf carts have become important components of the game of golf in the United States, and this isn't likely to change anytime soon. Nonetheless, we must protect the turf from added wear and soil compaction caused by unnecessary cart traffic. Restrict single-rider usage or develop effective guidelines and programs to reduce cart traffic damage. It is the responsibility of golfers to take care of golf courses and leave the turf in as good condition as they find it. Ballmark repair, divot

replacement, and judicious golf cart usage are all examples of golfer etiquette that go a long way in producing and sustaining quality turf and playing conditions throughout the golfing season. Let's all be sure to do our part!

BUD WHITE is director of the USGA Green Section's Mid-Continent Region and welcomes opportunities to ride with fellow players because it is good for the golf course.