

In the last issue of *The Florida Green*, Shelly Foy put together a tremendous article about the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) and details for implementation of several wildlife enhancement projects. I'd like to follow up on her excellent work with information

superintendents can use when asked why the ACSP isn't endorsed by the National Audubon Society.

The first fact to be noted is that there are over 500 Audubon Societies in the U.S., separately incorporated, each guided by its own Board of Directors with their own

programs and positions. The Audubon Society of New York State, the sponsoring organization of the ACSP, was the second State Audubon Society to be formed, founded in 1897 by Theodore Roosevelt and others. The National Audubon Society was formed in the 1940's to focus on issues beyond the scope of the state Audubon Societies.

Given this fact, the suggestion by members of the National Audubon that the New York State Audubon was attempting to exploit "the good Audubon name" when it instituted the ACSP, seems arrogant and presumptuous. The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York apparently agrees, since it ruled against National Audubon's lawsuit in 1987 in their attempt "to permanently enjoin the use of the term 'Audubon Society' or any variation thereof by the Audubon Society of New York State".

The fact that some golf course managers were unaware of these organizational differences is irrelevant. The merit of the program is what

attracted their interest, and if anything, finding out the National Audubon not only did not support it, but was harshly critical of it, surprised and disappointed those who chose to participate. There was no intent to mislead, and to my knowledge, no golf course in Florida has pulled out of the program or refused to join when this was explained to them.

The rift between the two organizations is philosophical, and can be best described as a battle between environmental idealism and "wise use" strategies. The National Audubon has taken the idealistic position while New York State Audubon represents a practical "wise use" philosophy.

What this means is that the National Audubon looks at all golf courses as pieces of ground which would better have served the needs of birds and other wildlife if left in the original undeveloped state. They are opposed, and always be opposed, to golf courses on this basic philosophical point.

The National Audubon refuses to acknowledge the positive environmental contributions of golf courses, but instead, focuses on the perceived negatives, such as pesticide and water use. Theirs seems to be a simplistic and unrealistic view that if the golf course wasn't there, the land used to build it would be left in its natural state as a pristine wilderness.

The New York State Audubon, on the other hand, takes the practical approach that any piece of property, including golf courses, can have a positive or a negative impact on the environment, depending on how the land is managed. They recognize the reality of private property rights and that people can and do use their land for various activities, and they realize the futility of simply preserving pristine land and creating new regulations to solve environmental problems. They believe that all land is important and that everyone can and must become actively involved in the stewardship of their land.

Thus was created the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, a proactive partnership of education and

## The rift between two Audubon Societies

### Mark My Words



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guidance for landowners to manage their land in a more environmentally friendly manner. The goals are to get people to use fewer pesticides, less water, more native plants, use energy more efficiently, recycle, and create wildlife habitat. On golf courses, this usually translates to building bird feeding stations, nestboxes, native grass restoration projects, aquatic environment enhancement, and other activities to increase space, food, water, and cover for wildlife.

The National Audubon's mindset that the best use of the land is to leave it alone blinds them to recent indications of properly managed lands creating greater biodiversity than wilderness areas, especially places like South Florida where many undeveloped tracts have been overtaken by exotics.

This "black-or white" mentality gives no credit to golf courses built on landfills or other marginally useful properties, or to the many ponds created for water hazards which serve to support many forms of wildlife. Sometimes golf courses are the only green spaces to be found in an urban area, and may often be the only safe haven for neotropical migrants looking for rest stops on their journeys between the Americas.

To most people, the word Audubon is synonymous with "birds", but it makes you wonder if those affiliated with the National Audubon have ever set foot on a golf course. At Palm Beach National, the course I manage, our mammal population is pretty much limited to raccoons, squirrels, opossums, armadillos, and an occasional fox, but our bird

population is large and diverse. On any given day you can see various species of ducks, herons, ibis, anhingas, egrets, cormorants, doves, crows, coots, owls, and many varieties of songbirds. Hawks and osprey hunt the property on a regular basis. At golf courses in less urban surroundings, even greater numbers and diversity of both mammals and birds can be found.

The Audubon controversy is a perfect example of environmental idealism versus "wise use" and good stewardship.

All Americans should carefully evaluate the positions and philosophies of the environmental organizations they choose to support, and the impact this has on personal freedoms, property rights, and economic security.



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