

Still Behind the 8-Ball!

(But there's light at the bottom of the pocket)

STEWARDSHIP NOTES



Shelly Foy

Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, I can sit comfortably in my home and watch monthly County Commission meetings on live TV. Talk about bizarre reality show.

I recently watched a parade of 20 or more citizens which included "activists" and normal every day homeowners like you and me come before the commissioners to convince them the time was right to purchase some environmentally -sensitive land surrounding a local body of water. There were people talking statistics, people talking money, people talking about growing up around this property and how things had changed. Then, one homeowner got up and made the comment, "If we don't do something now, we might as well just give up and let there be wall-to-wall golf courses".

The tone in this homeowner's voice when she said golf courses - you would have thought she was talking about toxic waste dumps. I thought, Well, this is obviously an uninformed person."

Then the reality dawns.

She truly believes golf courses are horrible things, and what's more, there are tons of people just like her. In addition to not liking golf courses, they stand up in front of county commissioners and have no qualms about saying how bad they think golf courses are. No research, no credible information, just a general dislike or distrust.

Over 10 years of environmental research and 10 years of education efforts through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP), and you know what?

We are still behind the eight-ball.

We have spent all this time trying to educate the golf industry about environmental issues, and how far have we come? I still can't convince more than 260 out of almost 1400 golf courses in my own state to use the best education program available to us (ACSP). If we can't even get it together in our own industry and step up to the plate, how in the world are we going to convince the general public that we are not the bad guys?

Yes, I know that participating in the ACSP is not the only way to show environmental stewardship. However, it is the most widely recog-

nized and industry-supported program we have. Even if you are already doing a lot of positive environmental things on your golf course without the ACSP, what means are you using to promote these efforts?

Audubon International has set a five-year goal of getting 8,000 golf courses involved in the ACSP. We are currently at 2,146, and as mentioned previously, fewer than 260 in Florida.

The time is right for you to get involved with this program and help us to get the word out to people in your community that golf courses and golf course superintendents do care about environmental issues. It will make our message a lot more credible when we can say 1,400 golf courses in Florida are working on environmental programs instead of 258 out of 1400. Perhaps then the day will come when none of us will have to hear people stand up and lambaste an industry that we obviously believe enough in to spend our lives doing it.

Just joining the program is not enough. You need to read and work through the certification workbook so that you will know you are doing the best you can for that property. Saying you are doing it and knowing you are doing it are two entirely different things. That's the bad news. For some good news read on.

You Can Make a Difference

One person, one golf course, can make a difference when it comes to educating the public about golf and the environment. Jim Schilling, golf course superintendent and his club, Bonita Bay East, are doing their part to educate the public about golf courses and the environment. This past year, they hosted 13 groups at the golf course, including one high school class and 12 elementary school tours.

The high school class was part of a Work Skills Program created to give high school students opportunities to learn about careers available in Southwest Florida. This program is a joint initiative of the School District of Lee County, The Foundation for Lee County Public Schools, Inc., and local business and industry.

Students spent time working with golf course employees to learn "hands on" about things



Bonita Bay East Superintendent Jim Schilling hosts multiple elementary school tours each year and hosts high school students and teachers in education and industry sponsored work skills programs.

like automated irrigation technology, IPM practices, recycling, use of native plants in landscaping, energy conservation, mechanical equipment and overall golf course operations. The title of Bonita Bay East's program was "Sharing the Land" and was developed so that students can learn how a golf course and local wildlife and native plants can exist in harmony.

Another part of the Work Skills Program involves teachers spending a week working with various businesses and industry. Bonita Bay East has participated in this program for many years, and Jim says that this is his fourth year of hosting a teacher for one week. The club pays a \$500 stipend to cover the teacher's workweek. During this week, the teacher learns all areas of golf course operations including IPM, irrigation, and equipment management. At Bonita Bay East, this program also exposes the teacher to the Audubon Signature Program. The teachers then take back all the information they have learned and share it with their students in the fall. According to Jim, "In a sense, the teacher becomes a steward for golf courses and the Audubon Signature Program".

What better way to get the word out to the public about golf and the environment than through teachers and students?

Wildflower Meadows at Bonita Bay East

Applewood Seed Company in Colorado developed a special blend of wildflower seeds specifically for Bonita Bay East. The company worked with Jim Schilling, superintendent, to develop a mix of seeds that would have a strong chance of reseeding in the Southwest Florida area. There are 15 species in this mix, and according to Jim, some species work better than others. There are 242,000 seeds per pound, a recommended planting rate of 11-22 pounds per acre, and the cost of the seed is \$24.00 a pound. Schilling has planted 3 to 4 acres to date. Benefits of the wildflower areas include:

- No irrigation needed after initial establishment
- No mowing or fertilizers required in these areas
- Creates habitat for butterflies and other insects, as well as turkey, deer, fox and numerous bird species

Environmental Case Study: Habitat Enhancement

Fred Klauk coordinated a Red Fox Environmental Enhancement project at TPC at Sawgrass to enhance and reestablish the red fox population. They created an environment for fox reproduction by building a steep bunker face in an out-of-play area to improve habitat and prevent disturbance by golfers.

They met their goals of providing suitable habitat and increasing the native fox population. They did have to reroute cart traffic away from the bunker to prevent disturbance and they marked the area with signs so the golfers would know what was going on.

The results were great! The foxes have reproduced every season.

Both golfers and employees have enjoyed this habitat enhancement project. Surprisingly, the report is that even hosting the Players Championship has had no effect on the mating foxes.



Wildflower Meadows at Bonita Bay East. Benefits of wildflower areas: No irrigation needed after initial establishment. No mowing or fertilizers required in these areas. Creates habitat for butterflies and other insects, as well as turkey, deer, fox and numerous bird species.

One More Reason to Be Proactive

(Editor's note: Judge the credibility of the source for yourself, but this is the kind of material that is getting published and broadcast. Shelly shares this information as a wake-up call for the golf industry)

A recent report called States of the Union: Ranking America's Biodiversity, prepared for the Nature Conservancy, has some disturbing news for Florida. The report looks at 21,395 known native plant and animal species in the U.S. and ranks the species at risk.

How does Florida measure up in this Study?

- 14.3% or 624 of 4,368 of our native species are threatened by extinction

- 3rd in the US in percentage of reptiles at risk
- 4th in percentage of birds at risk (Only three other states have a higher percentage of birds at risk than we do)
- 6th in the nation for plants at risk
- In the middle, as far as overall fish species that are endangered.

We all know that the big threats are coming from habitat destruction and degradation. A major problem we have in Florida comes from the spread of invasive species, which are choking out our natives. Golf courses in Florida have an excellent opportunity to recreate some of this lost habitat. There is a lot of "how to" information available on this from both Audubon International and the USGA.

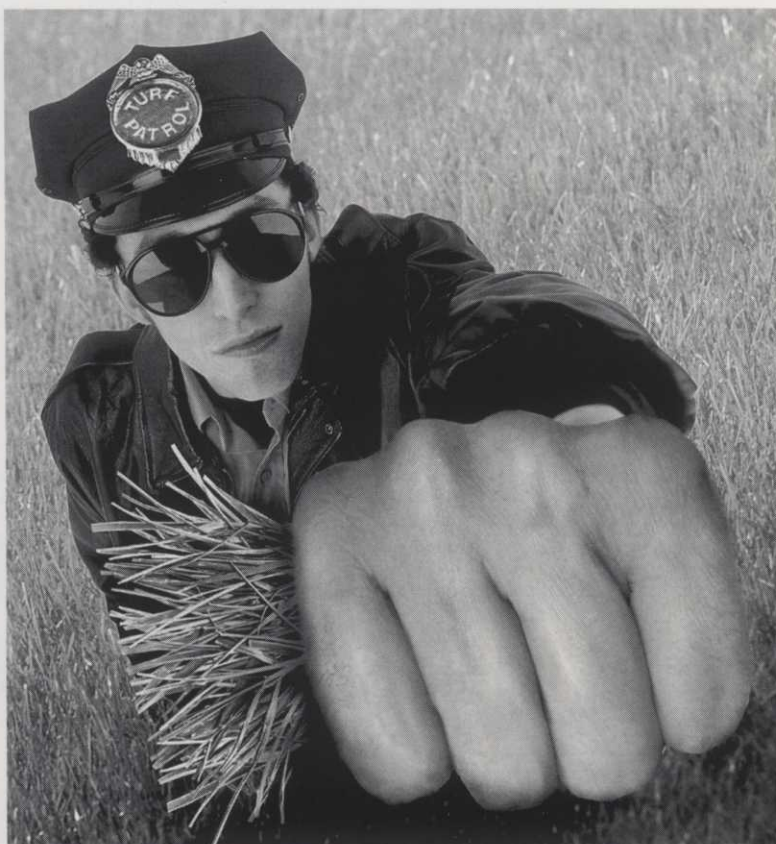


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