

# Developing Golf Courses In Harmony With Nature

*Editor's Note: Not all developers deserve a bad rap when it comes to environmental impact. Bonita Bay is among those companies who take their stewardship of the land and its resources very seriously.*

The Bonita Bay Group, a Southwest Florida developer known as a national leader for

and enhance the environment in which we all live and work could be a page out of The Bonita Bay Group's business plan," said Dennis Gilkey, president/CEO of The Bonita Bay Group. "Since the planning of our flagship community, Bonita Bay, in the early 80s, it has been our steadfast mission to achieve the highest standards in terms of land plan-



*The Brooks' restoration project returned a watershed flow-way to its natural state and rejoined 91 acres of wetlands, creating a nesting and roosting area for native birds.*



*Bonita Bay's Club at Mediterra won the National Private Club Environmental Leader's in Golf Award for 2002.*



*The Tom Fazio-designed Sabal golf course is located at Bonita Bay East on a site that includes 895 acres of cypress wetlands, 190 acres of pine flatlands, lakes and hundreds of Florida's state tree, the sabal palm.*

environmentally responsible development, holds the distinction of having created more Audubon International Signature Sanctuary golf courses than any other company in the world.

"Audubon International's work to protect

ning and environmental preservation."

"The Bonita Bay Group has set a new standard," said Ron Dodson, president/CEO of Audubon International. "Their commitment to environmental excellence in the planning, construction

and management of golf courses is certainly unique and provides significant benefits in terms of wildlife conservation, habitat enhancement, water conservation and water quality monitoring."

The company's long-term relationship with Audubon International has resulted in an impressive list of certifications:

**The Club at Mediterra**, with two Tom Fazio-designed courses, is the world's first private, 36-hole Audubon Silver Signature Sanctuary. The club's superintendent earned the highest award in the private club category of the 2002 Environmental Leaders in Golf Award, presented by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and *Golf Digest* magazine to the superintendent of a property that represents the highest level of commitment to environmental stewardship. Golf course superintendent Scott Whorral accepted the award at the GCSAA Conference and Show in Atlanta in February.

**The Estates at TwinEagles**, with a Jack Nicklaus- and Jack Nicklaus II- co-designed course, became the 11th certified Signature Sanctuary in the state of Florida; the Nicklaus team has been chosen to design the community's second course, which will also be developed as a Signature Sanctuary.

**Bonita Bay**, the company's flagship community with three Cooperative Sanctuaries designed by Arthur Hills on the site, was an early Audubon International participant; Bonita Bay received the development industry's highest international honor when it was named the Outstanding Large-Scale Community of the Year by the Urban Land Institute.

**Bonita Bay's two off-site courses designed by Tom Fazio became the world's first private 36-hole Audubon Signature Sanctuary. The club's director of golf course operations earned the GCSAA's 1999 National Environmental Steward Award in the private-facility category.**

**The Brooks**, a master-planned community, has been certified as a Cooperative Sanctuary through Audubon International's Business and Corporate Properties program.

"The Bonita Bay Group's commitment to the environment is evident from the moment they move earth, and from the moment they choose not to move earth," said Michael Stachura, *Golf Digest's* associate editor who presented Bonita Bay with the 1999 Environmental Leader in Golf Award. "They walk the line between development and a commitment to environmental stewardship better than any enterprise or business I know about."

According to Fazio, designer of golf courses at Bonita Bay Club East and Mediterra, "The Bonita Bay Group, from day one, set out to establish new standards for environmental responsibility. The design process at Bonita Bay Group courses evolves from an extensive review of the natural systems present on site. Once we understand the existing conditions, we set out to restore, enhance and protect wetlands, vegetation and habitat. Mediterra and Bonita Bay Club East represent the best in responsible development, utilizing a scientific approach to create a much improved environment."

"The Bonita Bay Group is an example, for those on either side of the development debate, of how the middle ground really can be achieved," Stachura added. "In an area where golf does not always get a glowing report card, The Bonita Bay Group shows not only the golf community, but also the global community, how to take care of the earth."

The Bonita Bay Group's approach to development and its participation in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programs yields benefits beyond the obvious, according to Gilkey.

"Developing in harmony with nature often includes restoring ecosystems to their historic integrity," Gilkey said. "Every property and golf course within our family of master-planned communities has been through aggressive programs, such as removal of exotic vegetation and replacement with native materials, restoration of wetlands and recreation of wildlife habitat. While this is not the most cost-effective method of development, the returns more than compensate for that front-end investment, both in the sustainability of the land and the appeal this environmental work has to prospective buyers. So it's a sound way of doing business and a win-win situation."

"We believe sustainability and respect for nature is everyone's responsibility," Gilkey continued. "Participation in Audubon International programs that reach from major development projects to backyard efforts is one of the best ways we know to help businesses and individuals assure that what we enjoy today will be enjoyed by future generations."

The Bonita Bay Group is a diversified company involved in the planning, development, sales and management of master-planned communities throughout Southwest Florida. The company employs more than 1,300 individuals and is developing six master-planned communities - Bonita Bay, The Brooks, Shadow Wood Preserve, Mediterra, The Estates at TwinEagles, and Verandah - along with 12 golf courses and two marinas.

The Bonita Bay Group team shares a dedication to exceptional customer service as defined in its E5 program: Ethics, Execution, Environmental Sensitivity, Excellence, Every Day.

Additional information about the company is available at [www.BonitaBayGroup.com](http://www.BonitaBayGroup.com).

-Amy Gravina

## Stewardship Notes

# Operative Word in ACSP is 'Cooperate'

By Shelly Foy

Thankfully, winter is almost over and the sun is shining again in Florida! We certainly did not have our usual bragging weather this year. That

Jeep Wrangler that I bought (and swore would never have the top on unless it was pouring rain) sadly has not been topless nearly enough because of the cold.

When you are riding in a Jeep with the top down, you tend to go slower so that you can take



everything in. You drive the back roads, the scenic routes, and you just think about things. At least I do, anyway. So on one of my recent gallivants around town I started thinking about the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and particularly the word *cooperative*. That one word emphasizes the

kind of relationship Audubon International wants with its members, but also stresses the value of reaching out as part of participating in the program.

The truly successful golf courses in the ACSP are those that do involve everyone, and, when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. If I am a golfer and I have a question, I am going to ask the golf pro. If I am working on the ACSP and need money, I am going to involve my general manager, green committee, beautification committee, etc.... because if they are supportive, they are going to make sure that I have the money I need. If I want to make a few changes on the golf course (like naturalizing areas), I am going to make sure that the golfers

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