



Naturalizing areas can add significant beauty and contrast to the golf course.

Can You Do Both?

Enhancing wildlife habitat and maintaining good playability.

*Stewardship Notes
Compiled by Shelly Foy*

Some of the benefits to naturalizing areas on the golf course include:

- **Providing food** and cover for wildlife
- **Contributing** to the conservation of local wildlife species
- **Contributing** to overall habitat in an area, especially when naturalized areas connect to other properties
- **Lowering maintenance** costs by reducing equipment wear and tear, as well as reducing the need for pesticides, fertilizers and water
- **Adding contrast** and natural beauty to the golf course

With a little thought, we believe you can enhance the wildlife habitat on the golf course and still have excellent playing conditions. Here are some things to consider:

NATURAL AREAS

- **Location:** Think out of play areas! Areas between fairways, below elevated tees, in roughs and bordering woodlands may be well suited for naturalization.
- **Plant Selection:** Think native! There is a reason why they grow well in our environment. Besides requiring less water and fertilizer, native plants hold up better during hurricanes.
- **Irrigation:** Needed for establishment,

but can then be eliminated to minimize weed invasion.

• **Start slowly** when developing naturalized areas so you can learn what works and does not work on your golf course. This will save you time and money in the long run.

• **Important to know:** Naturalized areas that you create are not “set in stone”. They can be altered if you find that they are not working the way you had planned.

Note: Maintenance requirements and inputs are reduced in naturalized areas compared to turf, but this is not a “no maintenance” feature, especially here in Florida. Your budget needs to include adequate resources for control-



NATURAL AREAS: Patrick Blum, Superintendent at Colonial Acres Golf Course, a 33-acre semi-private 9-hole course in upstate New York, marks possible areas for naturalization and then monitors these areas for footprints. If there are fewer footprints than his pre-determined threshold, he naturalizes that area

ling over-growth and weeds.

AQUATIC VEGETATION SHORELINE PLANTINGS

- **Extremely important** for providing habitat as well as a food source for a variety of wildlife
- **Helps maintain** water quality and filters runoff



BUFFER: Research has shown that an 8 to 15 ft. strip of higher cut vegetation, or turf buffers, is needed to help reduce surface runoff, provide sediment filtering and dilute chemicals. Moist soil conditions require wider buffers strips due to decreased infiltration.

- **Provides aesthetic** highlights and helps to stabilize shorelines
- **Reduces erosion**

Note: Aquatic plant material directly in the line of play can impact the speed of play when golfers are searching for balls and can cause problems with the Rules of Golf as well. In these locations, turf buffer strips are a good alternative.

GOLF COURSE PLAYABILITY ISSUES

Pace of play is important to all golfers. When creating wildlife habitat, keep these things in mind.

- **Be careful** to not create habitat in areas where golfers will likely hit the ball: this can obviously slow down pace of play.
- **Especially** for average- to high-

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PLAYABILITY: In areas that come directly into play, use care in naturalizing so as to not slow down pace of play.

handicap golfers, care needs to be exercised as far as the distance of forced carries over naturalized areas.

COMMUNICATION

Letting your golfers know what is going on is critical to the success of naturalized areas. There are many creative signs you can use on the golf course, and like they say, "A picture is worth a thousand words".

Mid to high handicap player:

- Carry 175 to 230
- Slice zone.
- Difficulty in hazards.
- Lost balls.

Women

- Carry 75 yds.
- Difficulty with hazards.
- Hit the ball straight.



COMMUNICATION: Signage does two things. It makes the golfers aware of the environment and it let's them know you're doing something positive about it.

Here are typical game characteristics of golfers of different skill levels. Use them to help select appropriate areas suitable for naturalization with minimal impact to playability of the golf course.

Low handicap players.

- Carry 200-250 yds.
- Little difficulty with hazards.
- Hit the ball fairly straight.
- Recovery shots.

Can Golf Improve its Environmental Game?

Editor's Note: Here is an excellent resource for generating ideas and interest at for making practical and reasonable environmental improvements to your golf course. Environmental issues are not going away. Get with the program.

America's love of golf is coupled with a passion for protecting and enhancing the natural environment in which the game is played. Evidence of that abounds in a new publication available from the United States Golf Association, which is in its 10th year of funding research and best management practices to provide golf course superintendents with the latest information on wildlife management and habitat conservation. *Wildlife Links: Improving Golf's Environmental Game* highlights research findings while providing practical tips and success stories for superintendents and course designers eager to develop and hone their green-management skills.

The dialogue couldn't be more timely. In the U.S. alone, there are more than 16,000 golf courses averaging upwards of 150 acres of open space per course and attracting 27 million golfers. Although golf courses are not substitutes for naturally occurring habitat, they increasingly are providing refuge to many wildlife species crowded out by urban development.

The connection is clear to Peter Stangel, Southeast regional director of the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation. "I grew up on a golf course," says Stangel. "Our front yard was just a short chip shot from the first green of the Rockport (Ill.) Country Club. Leaving the car parked in the driveway was risking a nasty dent from an errant slice, and I had to scour the yard for golf balls each week before mowing commenced."

Rockport offered great birding, recalls Stangel, who fantasized as a teenager about what he would do to make the course even better for wildlife. He