

**USGA UPDATE**

**BUT...We Cannot Let Our Guard Down**

*By John Foy*

The holiday season is upon us and the winter golf season in Florida is cranking up. As November winds down, everyone is able to breathe a sigh of relief because this also means that the 2006 Atlantic Hurricane Season is coming to an end and the state was not hit by a major storm. After the last two years of multiple hurricanes hitting Florida, everyone desperately needed a break!



Naturally, with not having to conduct storm recovery, it has been much easier to prepare for the winter play season. During TAS visits over the past few weeks, it has been found that in general, good quality course conditioning is being provided. Interestingly, in some areas of the state, rainfall is running 10-20 inches below year-to-date averages. While this creates some course-management challenges, I am sure that everyone will take this situation over the hurricanes.

On Nov. 16, the NOAA Climate Prediction Center issued its final forecast for the 2006-2007 U.S. winter season (December, January, February). For Florida and the Southeast, near-average temperatures are predicted. The outlook is for wetter-than-average precipitation conditions across the entire southern tier of the country.

At first glance this forecast does not sound that bad. However, we should not forget the problems experienced at many courses throughout the state during the El Nino winters of the mid-90s. Record-setting cold temperatures did not occur, but the prolonged periods of cool and wet weather took its toll on course conditioning and quality. Even with only moderate traffic and wear, a pronounced decline in coverage and density occurred; and with this, rapid algae invasion quickly followed. Regardless of inputs, producing any

degree of recovery was a very slow process and sometimes not completed until the late spring to early summer.

Based on previous experience, it is strongly urged that course managers err on the side of caution and maintain as much grass as possible going into the winter. For some, the greens are never fast enough; but remember slow greens are better than no greens. Also, cart traffic management and directional-control devices are generally not popular, but are a necessary part of course management to minimize deterioration and help survive until the weather is favorable to sustained turf growth, hopefully by mid-February to early March in South Florida.

**GCSAA NEWS**

**Chapter Delegates Look to the Future**

Noting the association and its members have made significant gains on several fronts, the Oct.13-15 GCSAA Chapter Delegates meeting took a strategic approach in discussing how GCSAA could sustain that momentum in achieving its mission, vision and goals.

"I commend and appreciate the delegates for the energy they displayed during the meeting," said Ricky Heine, CGCS meeting chairman and GCSAA vice-president. "They were focused and well-prepared in giving the board of directors and staff their perspectives on how we achieve our long-term vision. They took ownership of their association and in their responsibility as delegates. It is obvious they engaged their members in talks before the meeting."

The exchange of ideas and comments focused primarily on three items:

- **the development of long-term revenue streams to fund programs and services;**
- **growing the GCSAA membership;**
- **positioning GCSAA and its membership classes in the marketplace (primarily to employers and influential golfers).**

The financial conversations centered on the establishment of a long-term dues pricing strategy. At the request of the delegates, the board and staff presented a proposal that would tie the establishment of membership dues to an index (such as the Consumer Price Index). Historically, the association has enacted a dues increase in larger increments on average every five to seven years. The result has been a loss of members.

There was widespread agreement at the meeting that smaller dues increases would be more easily absorbed at the facility level and less likely to result in membership declines. Directors further discussed the issue at their fall meeting, October 20-21 in New Orleans.

Tied to the discussion of revenues was an examination of GCSAA membership numbers. From a high of more than 22,000 in 2001, the association's membership has declined approximately 10 percent to just over 20,000 today. There was agreement that the situation has been created in large part by a struggling golf economy and the implementation of member standards.

Staff presented a seven-phase membership growth and recruitment campaign enacted late last year. Delegates supported the efforts, realizing such an initiative will take time to yield results and must be long-term in nature. They were especially supportive of the GCSAA field staff pilot program and encouraged strong consideration for expanding it in the near future.

The liveliest debate was on GCSAA's philosophy regarding the positioning of the association and its membership classes. Delegates shared a variety of opinions, but ultimately agreed that for membership standards to have value in the marketplace, they must be promoted externally. There was unanimous support that greater resources be dedicated to marketing the association. While there will be a focus on Class A because of the PDI process to attain and maintain Class A, it was noted, however, that promoting Class A does not mean that marketing other membership classes should not be part of the program.