

A BIG Master Plan



GREEN SIDE UP
By JOEL JACKSON

We know BMP stands for Best Management Practice. A large number of Florida agricultural and green industry commodities, in cooperation with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, have developed and published Best Management Practice manuals for their industries.

Mike Thomas with the Non-Point Source Pollution Department of FLDEP has been the point person for many of these BMP projects as the state sought to work with industries to protect the state's water quality by helping industries document ways to minimize unintended inputs to the environment.

In January 2007, several years of collaborative work paid off. Input by a committee of state, county and water-district regulators, university researchers, golf course superintendents, designers, managers and owners, plus representatives from the Sierra Club and 1,000 Friends of Florida culminated in the publica-

tion of a set of Golf Course BMPs. The official title is Best Management Practices for the Enhancement of Environmental Quality on Florida Golf Courses.

This publication already has provided a greater level of awareness and education to local governments about the complex and professional ways superintendents manage golf course maintenance practices. In many of the recent local fertilizer ordinances, the fertilizer management recommendations contained in the Golf BMPs are cited as the method golf courses are to follow when applying nitrogen and phosphorous in those cities and counties having new laws.

Thus, golf courses have had the benefit of continuing to operate under a rule which recognizes sound science rather than the well-intended but short-sighted "summer black-out periods" placed on residential and commercial landscape fertilizing. Why the Green Industry BMP Manual (for landscapers and homeowners), which also contains the same credible science is not cited more, remains a mystery.

As concerns over the environment continue to escalate, especially sources and uses of water, fears about pesticide residues and carbon dioxide emissions, we need to find a way to demonstrate more forcefully that golf courses are committed to being positive environmental and economic community assets.

The Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary program has been a viable program in which courses can receive advice and assistance in documenting current practices and

offer a certification program for demonstrating a course's ability to adapt, adopt, and – most importantly – verify environmentally sound practices.

Another program that has earned a lot of respect was the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program. It is an industry- and state-coordinated program which certifies properties in the training and implementation of turfgrass management BMPs.

Our Florida Golf BMP manual has received a lot of notice around the country and several associations have been asking how it was written and produced. The point is that BMPs are gaining more importance nationwide and we need to think seriously about how we can develop a program that can help us showcase our innate environmental stewardship that still goes mostly undocumented.

At a time when water use on turfgrass is coming under more scrutiny than ever before, we need a vehicle to formally unify all golf courses so our voice becomes stronger and more credible. One way to do that is to have all golf courses become members of our own Florida Golf Course or Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program. I would suggest that courses that have already achieved ACSP certification or are actively participating in the program would be recognized as being in compliance with the BMP based program.

The best example of industry solidarity and credibility occurred recently when 97 percent of Georgia's golf courses signed pledges to endorse and follow the Georgia Golf Course Water

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Conservation BMPs. So when, GGCSA representatives argued for easing the draconian water restrictions imposed on golf courses, they spoke from a position of strength and not just good intentions.

We need our FGCSA members and courses to go on the record, sign up, document practices and become certified in the Florida Golf BMPs. We can do it now voluntarily and take control of our destiny or we can wait to fight nit-picking regulations imposed upon our management practices.

By showing such initiative, perhaps we can get our BMPs adopted as a rule by the state and consider it a Big Master Plan we can all use in common for the economic and environmental success of golf in Florida.