Audubon, courses team up to save wildlife

More than 100 courses already signed onto program

By Mark Leslie and Kit Bradshaw

Golf courses and an Audubon Society wildlife sanctuary program "are a perfect match," according to an environmental specialist with the U.S. Golf Association.

By July, more than 100 courses in 26 states had shown interest in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, administered by the New York Audubon Society and USGA.

"I am continually finding that many golf courses are already way in advance," she said. "They have been doing conservation practices. Or they have one element of the environment they are interested in. For instance, they have put up their wood duck boxes, or worked very hard to keep their purple martin populations.

"It's amazing to find so many who have already participated in this fashion. It's refreshing," Superintendent William Black, who has signed his Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Md., on to the program, said. "A lot of us have been doing a lot of these programs for years anyhow."

Since 1981, Congressional has had a program that has greatly increased the Eastern bluebird population on the course. "People

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Wildlife at refuge at John's Island West

By Kit Bradshaw

VERO BEACH, Fla. — Otters play in its waters, Armadillos burrow, and purple martins sun themselves there. Mockingbirds, cardinals and osprey nest in its trees. No, it's not Walt Disney World or some man-made zoo. It's John's Island West, which serves as a prime example of a golf course's sensitive use of land.

"When we built John's Island West, we wanted to abide by all the rules and regulations. But, most importantly, we wanted to protect the environment and do it on a positive basis," said architect Tom Fazio. The result, according to golf course manager Tim Hiers, is that one scientist even planted an endangered species at John's Island West so that it would be assured of being preserved.

All agree the parcel of land was spectacular to begin with.

John Fitzpatrick, executive director of the Archbold Biological Station near Lake Placid, describes the land as "one of the rarest habitats in North America. Every square meter is precious to wildlife. It has a fairly large number of endangered species, and it is now a permanent habitat preserve that also provides recreation and beauty. It is the best example of bringing these two goals together."

One factor that makes this course unique in Florida is that no residences surround it. Fazio said that because of this, "we were able to leave much of the natural vegetation and fit the golf holes into the original contours."

As a result of the careful construction, Continued on page 31

Drought information network established in California

After being drought parched for more than five years, California is fighting back with a new way to get the latest word on the state's water supply.

A computer system called Advanced Technology Information Network (ATI-Net) lets users tap into comprehensive drought information gleaned by the California Department of Water Resources.

According to ATI-Net General Manager Jeff Ennen, those with menu-driven information systems, modem and communications software can call in through a phone line to ATI's Fresno-based computer.

"It's fairly straightforward," Ennen said of the system, which walks users through a variety of information options like "press letter A for agricultural news."

Ennen said the drought information maintained by ATI-Net includes a listing of California water districts and the population bases supported by those districts; as well as updated general drought information; county-by-county look at the drought; and government assistance programs available to help companies hurt by the economic impact of the drought.

While most of the aid programs were originally set up to help agricultural enterprises such as farms, Ennen suggested that golf course superintendents review the listings, to see if any aid programs would apply to the golf industry.

Such aid could include grants, loans, cost sharing, or technical assistance.

ATI-Net also includes an analysis of state water supplies by region, assessing both the current and potential impact of the drought on those water supplies. A list of publications that provide drought information is also available to ATI-Net users, Ennen said.

For more information on ATI-Net call 209-278-4572.

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permanent reduction in water use over the next few years, Harbison predicted.

Attaining that goal will require incentives, although some water districts are already willing to shut off water to landscapers completely or on a percentage basis.

Percentage-based reductions are a very unfair way of rationing because the people who have conscientiously conserved over the years are penalized more severely than those who have always wasted water and will now be allotted a more reasonable amount, Harbison said.

Hopefully, most water districts will begin allocating water on a per-capita basis, Harbison said. Water allotments should be determined on an area's evapotranspiration rate and the area a landscaper is covering, he added.

Harbison favors an allotment method giving a landscaper a certain amount of water based on the area he is covering, he said. Water rates should be based on a landscaper's rate and the area a landscaper is covering.

Before such a system gains widespread acceptance, the landscape industry will likely see peak-season pricing, with higher prices in summer than winter; graduated pricing, with more per unit than a small user; maintenance contracts, with landscapers rewarded for saving water and punished for wasting it; incentives to replace thirsty cool-season turf with more-water-thrifty warm-season grasses; plantings of more desert-type landscapes; and, installation of efficient irrigation systems.

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Archbold Biological Station is using John's Island West as a permanent habitat preserve to help save the endangered Lakeola's Mint. Harbison is also cataloguing the plants on the course, including an unusually large number of sand pines.

Harbison said the course is working in other ways to help the environment.

"I would say there is a better bird population, with more variety of birds, now than there was before construction," Hiers said.

"We have several migratory birds who stop here, and we have sandhill cranes, wood storks, wood ibis, both the great white, the great blue herons, scrub jays, mockingbirds, brown thrashers, cardinals and osprey.

"The wood stork and the sandhill cranes are getting to be pretty rare in Florida, but we have them at John's Island West.

"Also," Hiers said, "we've stocked the lake and the ponds with trout and bass, and they are doing just great. With no one fishing in the lakes, their only enemies are the birds and the otters.

"The otters are now here because we have created the lakes which are an attractive habitat — stocked with fish — for them," he said. "And we have opossums, bobcats, marsh cottontail rabbits, gopher tortoises, armadillos, box turtles, and even, occasionally, a piney ridge hog. There are all kinds of snakes here, from the endangered indigo snake to the Eastern diamondback and pigmy rattlesnake to the water snakes, coral snakes and rat snakes."

We view all open space as important to wildlife.
— Ron Deddon
New York Audubon Society

Hiers noted that creation of the course provided a secondary benefit to the environment that might not be apparent.

"A lot of people don't realize that, while a golf course might remove trees, there are always trees added to the course as well," he said. And, the majestic trees that are vulnerable to lightning in south Florida are now protected (with cabled-lighting protection), where they weren't protected when they were growing in the wild.

The New York Audubon Society recognized the importance of golf courses to wildlife and has helped the U.S. Golf Association initiate a nationwide cooperative wildlife sanctuary program.

"We view all open space as important to wildlife," New York Audubon Society President Ron Dodson said, "and through this program we are able to work with managers and golf course superintendents to have golf courses be part of the sanctuary system."

John's Island West is one of the courses working with the Audubon Society in the Hedging program. Hiers said through the Audubon Society and Archbold Biological Station, his course's value as a wildlife area is being enhanced. And he thinks it's important for the public to become more educated on the positive role of a golf course.

"In several areas of the country, specifically Westchester County, N.Y., they have proven that, for every gallon of water a course uses, it recharges seven gallons to the aquifer. A typical acre of golf course turf in Florida returns 650,000 gallons of water to the aquifer a year. I don't think the public knows this," Hiers said.

Despite evidence that suggests courses can be a partner in helping the environment, Hiers said the public's attitudes are difficult to change. He feels the change must begin with the superintendents themselves.

"The person who has the strongest vested interest in a golf course is the superintendent," he said. "The superintendent's career, his livelihood, his self-esteem... everything is based on the condition and success of that course. Logically, it stands to reason that he is going to be the one interested in quality control, what it will take to maintain that course with a reasonable amount of money, and all the other factors considered, including the environment."

Saying golf courses should be designed to minimize the potential hazard to the environment, Hiers added that superintendents "should be involved with the courses before construction starts. They should be there when the specifications are written, so they can say, "We don't want to irrigate this area,' and give the owner a chance to make an intelligent decision whether or not the area should have irrigation."

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