Michigan golf summit puts issues into perspective

By Bradley S. Klein

The temperature outside had plummeted over the weekend into the 20s, an annoying reminder that golf in Michigan is a seasonal affair. But the 200 participants in Michigan Golf Summit II, who met Nov. 4-5 in Ypsilanti, were drawn there out of concern for other kinds of climate, namely legislative and economic.

Sponsored by the Continuing Education Division of Eastern Michigan University and Michigan Golfer Magazine, the meeting brought together golf association directors, state government officials, journalists and golf facility owners/managers. They exchanged ideas and sometimes crossed swords over the future of the phenomenal golf boom that has overtaken the state.

The chief issue in Michigan golf is defining and regulating wetlands. The Environmental Protection Agency is involved in complex negotiations about what constitutes a wetland. With so much land in northern Michigan devoted, or planned, for golf, the parameters of that decision will have an enormous impact on the game's growth.

One high-profile resort project, The Home-stead, with land adjacent to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, is caught up in a jurisdictional dispute between the EPA and the state's Department of Natural Resources.

Meanwhile, a fascinating roundtable on "Golf and the Environment: A Compatible Team?" focused on cooperative efforts among superintendents, naturalists, and scientists in taking proactive measures to ensure environmentally sound practices.

The panelists agreed it is not the function of media to serve as industry handmaidens.

Judy Gough, golf writer for the Detroit News, opened the session with a straightforward account of how difficult it is for one correspondent to cover an entire sport statewide. She encouraged members of the golf community to make more effective efforts to publicize good stories.

In response to criticism about too much "negative" news, Lynn Henning, editor of PGA Magazine, reaffirmed the integrity of the journalist's craft as simply getting at the truth — a truth, he said, "that is not always positive."

It remains to be seen whether Michigan will get a golf council like those in Florida and Arizona. There are great differences in the interests of the golf resort owners, who tend to be up north, and the private clubs, many of which are in the south.

Moreover, the limited means available to the many family-owned operations may preclude their participation in a statewide effort that might benefit only some sectors of the industry.

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