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Mike Humiston, PhD and architect, challenges the norm in greens construction. 31

Would Americans play more?

Flood devastates Texas courses
By Peter Blais
Jack and Melissa Fletcher stood along the banks of the Brazos River Christmas Eve watching the rain-swollen waters rise at the rate of an inch per hour and drown their nine-hole course.

"It died a slow death," re-called Jack, who helps daughter Melissa manage Valley Lodge Golf Club in Simonton, Texas, 30 miles west of Houston. "It was a very helpless feeling."

Valley Lodge was one of many courses suffering major damage from the heavy rains that delayed eastern Texas in late December.

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Strategic plan critical challenge to club managers' association
By Peter Blais
Jack Sullivan found his bride and a career on the golf course.

The new Club Managers Association of America president was a high school teacher in Fairfield, Iowa, when he met wife, Darcy. Darcy's house bordered the fifth tee at Fairfield Golf & Country Club.

The two played a lot of golf together and Jack eventually got a part-time job as the club's bar manager. He quickly became the club’s assistant manager and his career was off and running.

That career has taken him to The Whiconsida Club in Des Moines, Iowa, Nakoma Golf Club in Madison, Wis. and his present employer, Grosse Pointe Yacht Club in Grosse Pointe Woods, Mich.

"This is the first time I've been at a club without a golf course," said Sullivan, who came aboard Grosse Pointe in 1987.

"Basically, I've traded in the golf course, my handicap used to be in single digits. Now it's up around 18."

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Wetlands manual in midst of flux
From staff reports
The long-awaited revision of the Federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands remains on hold and developers have been told to disregard the 1989 manual in favor of the 1987 version.

Mike Kelly, vice president of Williamsburg Environmental Group in Williamsburg, Va., said a revised manual probably will not be completed for another six to 12 months.

"The reason is that environmentalists are up in arms over Bush's wetlands plan," Kelly said. "Hysteria has caused pressure to re-evaluate changes."

Meanwhile, he said, a bill in Congress, introduced by Louisiana Rep. Jimmy Hayes and co-sponsored by more than 145 congressmen, is "moving slowly through the process." Hayes' bill would revamp the whole Clean Water Action Plan, "hastening the process."

From elections to speakers to award-winners, all the information you need is here.
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Stricter pesticide laws in the making
By Peter Blais
A growing number of communities are proposing laws restricting pesticides since last summer's U.S. Supreme Court ruling that federal law cannot stop local governments from regulating their use.

The result could be thousands of unscientific, contradictory regulations making it harder for golf course superintendents and others in the turf industry to do their job, according to those supporting recently proposed legislation allowing federal law to preempt local ordinances.

"We are pushing for uniform pesticide laws imposed by federal and state governments—what recently was a sea of bills making it impossible to do our job."

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Flood waters jeopardize Texas golf courses

Continued from page 1
early July. The course was expanding to 18 holes when the flood hit. All nine existing greens were eight to 10 feet under water, he said.

"Fortunately we had just cleared and staked the new nine. If we were farther along, it could have been a lot worse," the elder Fletcher said.

As it is, the Fletchers will have to indefinitely delay work on the new nine they had hoped to open in June. The course was not insured for flood damage, although they expect some federal disaster relief.

The owners plan to wash the silt off the existing greens, using an oil field vacuum to help, and re-open as soon as possible as a nine-hole operation, he added. "It's a matter of economics," Fletcher said.

EFFECTS FAR-REACHING

Downriver courses, like Valley Lodge, were hit particularly hard as water managers were forced to open upriver dams before they burst.

"Lake Waco is the major reservoir in this area," said Jim Moore, director of the U.S. Golf Association Green Section's Mid-Continent Regional office in Waco. "The previous record was 18 feet above normal. It got as high as 33 feet during the worst of the storms."

Stephen F. Austin Golf Club along the Brazos River 50 miles west of Houston received just five inches of rain, according to superintendent Doug Brown. But water rushing down from the north raised the river level 20 feet, flooding seven greens, five tees and parts of every fairway.

Brown lost 60 feet of turf and earth behind one green and won't know whether it will need rebuilding until water levels drop. Other greens had as much as five inches of silt and were being washed off with high-pressure hoses attached to the irrigation system's quick couplers.

Much of the over-seeded ryegrass still looks green, Brown reported. But he won't be able to fully assess damage until the underlying common Bermudagrass fairways and Tifdwarf greens come out of dormancy this spring.

It's been a tough start for Brown, who took over the course 2 1/2 years ago. He resurfaced nine greens that summer, 15 greens the following winter and has put in new drainage systems to overcome summer heat and winter frost. Now the flood may take several more. "This is the worst flooding I've ever seen," said Brown, who has worked on and off at Stephen F. Austin since 1976.

Pecan Grove Country Club in Richmond was another Houston-area course suffering significant damage. Eighteen inches of rain fell on the course from just before Christmas through Jan. 6, according to superintendent Noel Villareal.

Standing water caused large turf areas to simply rot, he said. The course had been officially closed 22 days through Jan. 6, although many of the club's 1,400 members turned out to play during the infrequent sunny days.

Villareal said he will not replant the damaged over-seeded ryegrass, poa annua and bentgrass. He will instead wait until the Bermudagrass starts greening up in late February or early March to take corrective action.

"The best thing for me to do is wait," he said. "I won't overseed because first, it's too expensive, and second, it would just be competition for the Bermudagrass."

Houston wasn't the only area ravaged by floods.

Farther north in Austin, Onion Creek Country Club had two tee boxes and a green washed away. Nine other greens were submerged and five may need rebuilding due to silt damage, according to superintendent Larry Clanton.

Bloating by 15 inches of rain in 4 1/2 days, Onion Creek claimed 50 of the course's 57 sand bunkers and a bridge. Clanton pegged the cleanup costs at $218,000, not including the five additional greens that may or may not need rebuilding.

"We lost our maintenance building in a fire in August of 1989. Then we lost 12 greens to the cold weather that winter. Now this. We've had our share of calamities the past few years," Clanton said.

Waco, midway between Dallas and Austin, didn't escape Mother Nature's wrath. Located along the shores of Lake Waco, the rising waters covered four greens at Ridgewood Country Club, leaving one submerged for three weeks, reported superintendent Mandal Brockinton.

The lake deposited debris two feet deep in a 2,000-yard-long, 10-yard-wide swath. It included boats, trash, fishing equipment, logs and silt, Brockinton said.

The water also rose seven feet high on the walls of the maintenance building, destroying the irrigation system's computer and controllers, all of Brockinton's records, $8,000 worth of tools and $24,000 worth of silt. The course's three pumps were submerged, although Brockinton hopes they can be rebuilt rather than replaced.

Assessing damage to the bentgrass greens and Bermudagrass fairways had to wait until the waters subsided, Brockinton said.

However, the course's bentgrass nursery, which germinated the day before flood waters hit, was destroyed, he added.

SILT A KILLER

While the immediate damage to those and other courses is terrible, the biggest costs could still lie ahead, the USGA's Moore said. Silt is the culprit.

Once in the green, silt works its way into the upper root zone and forms an impervious layer. Water can't penetrate it and even greens built to USGA specifications will drain poorly.

Superintendents will do their best...
Cornell investigates Milorganite’s effectiveness vs. deer

Research has shown that the fertilizer Milorganite may be used to discourage deer browsing. Milorganite may offer some relief from deer damage and applied research has been initiated to qualify the product’s effectiveness in an urban area where deer predation is a problem.

A study at Cornell University’s Cooperative Extension Service in Dutchess County, N.Y., is attempting to quantify the product’s effectiveness. The researchers feel the scent of the product may be the reason the deer choose to browse elsewhere.

Les Hulcoop, Cooperative Extension agent for Dutchess County, who is conducting the study, said, “The deer are definitely staying away from the Milorganite applications at this time. We feel some of the commercially labeled treatments on the market do quite well in checking deer damage, but the plants grow out of the protection during spring and summer. Additionally, the users do not like the white film some of these treatments leave on the growing plant material.”

According to the study, Milorganite should be applied one to two times per month and after each snowfall in the winter months. The researchers feel the scent of the product may be the reason the deer choose to browse elsewhere.

Many of the deer repellent treatments lose their effectiveness in winter after temperatures fall below 10 degrees F.

The study will also assess predation control if Milorganite is hung in bags from the target plants throughout the winter.

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