Are the seasons getting longer?

Superintendents in the transition zones say 'Yes'

By MARK LESLIE

P lanning seasons are getting longer in some areas of the country, causing turfgrass damage of which many superintendents are not even aware.

"It's a two-edged sword," superintendent Russell Bateman said matter-of-factly of the five Baltimore Municipal Golf Courses.

"On Thanksgiving weekend at the end of November if you have days anywhere near 50 degrees, this place is packed," said Bill Neus of the private semi-private Hobbits Glen Golf Course in Baltimore, president of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Course Superintendents. "When I got into this business, after Labor Day play just died. That's not even part of the equation any more."

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USGA reports on nationwide university research

Turfgrass safer than farmland, research studies confirm

By MARK LESLIE

Major university studies around the country are verifying the belief that turfgrass is a vast improvement to agricultural land in pesticide and fertilizer leaching, and researchers are even comparing differences between grasses in runoff studies.

The U.S. Golf Association Green Section’s newly released annual Environmental Research Summary notes these findings along with many others in its review of USGA-funded research projects. The booklet reports results after the second year of the three-year studies.

Objectives of the overall project are to understand the effect of turfgrass pest management and fertilization on water quality and the environment; evaluate valid alternative methods of pest control to be used in integrated turf management systems; and determine

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Environmental findings widespread, report says

From staff reports

Ten years and $5 million after it was undertaken, new and better grasses that survive on less water and lower maintenance have been developed through the Turfgrass Research Program initiated in 1982 by the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) Green Section and Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. So the USGA Executive Committee has committed its support for another five years, according to Jim Snow, Green Section national director.

Some 40 research projects improved knowledge about water-use rates of various turfgrasses and how these grasses react to moisture stress; introduced new grasses that use less water and pesticides; and forwarded understanding of maintenance practices.

Snow said: "Through the efforts of the individual turfgrass scientists and their support staff, many significant
Longer seasons mean agronomic problems in transition zone

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“Winter play does severe harm to the grass. You compact the soil and you have weeds and poor water infiltration. People wonder why and associate it with summer problems instead of being caused by playing months before, during the winter.”

Since turfgrass is mostly dormant in the fall, winter and early spring, it is unable to recover from traffic, divots and ball marks during that time. So the turf thins out, leaving perfect conditions for infestation of poa annua and weeds like goosegrass and crabgrass, Snow said.

Neus said that while Hobbits Glen has always remained open year-round, the level of maintenance is noticeably different now. “If the traps aren’t frozen, they [members] expect them to be raked in January and February. They want the course as prepared as possible. We have a few winter greens that we mow and roll periodically,” he said.

Added Bateman: “We’re open 364 days a year. Even New Year’s Day is big if it’s decent weather... Our mission is to provide golf.”

WINTER PLAY PROBLEMS

But providing golf has its drawbacks. Divots, Neus said, are a massive nuisance. “In a mild winter the landing areas get like land mines,” he said. “Golfers need to take more care in the winter and they don’t. Ball marks are also big problems. Along with divots in the fairways, they exacerbate the problem of poa annua when you have traffic. In a mild winter poa annua will continue to germinate and it grows into those areas...”

Since thinning and soil compaction leave a green open to poa annua encroachment, “this can be disaster if you’re trying to grow bentgrass greens,” said Snow. “It at all possible, try not to use the greens during the winter. Play on temporary greens.”

Because more work is required to maintain courses in the winter, less time is available for normal wintertime work and a larger crew is necessary come spring, Neus said.

“Traditionally, wintertime has been our off-season when we’ve done tree and drainage work — non-maintenance things,” he said. “Now you have to mesh it in, whereas before you could almost go out with blenders on, not worry about the rest of the course and focus on projects.”

More part-time help is also required. “Now I have a couple of part-timers right through the wintertime,” Neus said. “It does make your full-time staff so much more critical. If you don’t have an adequate staff, a lot of things won’t get done.

“Then you run into snow. That can screw things up, too.”

Butting Heads

While using temporary greens would solve many of the headaches, they are often politically incorrect in the clubhouse. “Golfers just don’t want that. When they come out in January they want to play the whole golf course. You’re always butting heads,” Neus said. “I don’t like playing on a temporary green, either. So I understand. But it’s a hard sell that winter golf is one of the most detrimental things you can do. There’s nothing good about it for the turf.

“Avoid winter golfers will hang petitions in the locker room to keep the greens open. They rant and rave at green committee meetings. They don’t want to hear that they are damaging the course. To them, it’s a crock.”

Change is Permanent

It does not appear this trend toward longer seasons will reverse. Terry Buchen, superintendent at Double Eagle in Galen, Ohio, attributed it to several things that evolved in the 1970s. Golf club members never used to play other courses, he said. “Then, in the ’70s, they started, and they compared. Secondly, seasons are longer. Even in true Northern climates like Chicago and upstate New York. People get cabin fever. When you get one week of fine weather in the spring, members say, ‘Why can’t we play?’

“Members also want to get their money’s worth. Another reason is that people sit in their living rooms in the second week of April and see the Masters on television, and want to play.”

Former Oregon Golf Course Superintendents Association

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Super's construction responsibilities specific but varied

BY TERRY BUCHEN

The responsibilities of a golf course superintendent during course construction are many and varied. Here are the most crucial:

1. Communications: Act as a liaison and owner's representative between the course architect, builder, sub-contractors and the owner/developer on the construction site.

2. Specifications: Work with the course architect in preparing construction specifications, with the owner's best interests, objectives and budget constraints in mind.

3. Irrigation: Work with the irrigation system designer in developing the sprinkler system with the owner's and architect's best interests and budget in mind.

4. Budgets: Prepare the following budgets for the owner:
   a. Grow-in maintenance budget.
   b. Post grow-in maintenance budget.
   c. Capital golf course maintenance equipment budget.
   d. Capital golf course maintenance building structure and contents budget.
   e. Capital golf course accessories budget.

5. Design: Work with the owner's building architect to develop the floor plans and objectives for:
   a. The golf course maintenance building.
   b. Soil storage and irrigation pumphouse.
   c. A snack bar and halfway house on course.

6. Photographs: Take photographs of all irrigation drainage work, and initial golf course construction as a permanent file for the owner.

7. Assauls: Help the golf course contractor and sub-contractors prepare permanent as-built blueprints of all construction activity, such as irrigation, drainage, underground utility lines, utility conduits, and anything else buried on site.

8. Environment: Coordinate environmental impact studies.

9. Helping hand: Assist the total effort by locating local sod sources, building permanent putting greens for the marketing department, testing the sand-soil mix for the greens, obtaining bids by contractors, making final selection of a contractor, scheduling construction, installing electricity for the irrigation pumphouse as soon as possible, hiring a staff and growing the course as soon as possible.

Be friendly and cooperative with the owner, architect and contractor.

Hagy joins Diamond Run

PITTSBURGH — Richard A. Hagy has been appointed superintendent at Diamond Run Golf Club.

Hagy began his career in golf course maintenance at the famed Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Ga., home of the Masters. Following his seven-year stint at Augusta, Hagy accepted the position of assistant golf course superintendent at Woodcrest Country Club in Cherry Hill, N.J. in 1983. He then accepted a similar position at The Club at Nevillewood, in suburban Pittsburgh, in 1991.

Longer seasons

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President Mark Snyder, of Salishan Lodge Golf Links in Gleneden Beach, Ore., said: "It is safe to say the Northwest reflects many other areas of the country in terms of increased play. Typically, it is very weather-related. If the weather's nice, the parking lot is full. If not, it's empty."

CONTRAST AND COMPARE

Yet, if superintendents want to debate closing their courses, they might present evidence from one New Jersey municipal facility.

Snow said this 36-hole facility had severe goosegrass problems in the summertime and decided to close one 18-hole course during the winters. "The difference between the greens was unbelievable," he said. "The goosegrass almost went away on the one course, while the other continued to have severe goosegrass problems. It dramatically illustrated the effects of thinning on the turf."

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