

Red tape in Minnesota ... Weenies on parade

Several times during the course of writing my story on Jeff Brauer's project in Biwabik, Minn. (see page 1), I fell into deeper, more broad conversations with various people involved in the erstwhile development. More than once they posed the question, "Geez, from now on, do you think every project in Minnesota will be so fiercely opposed?"

Invariably, the long-delayed Homestead project came up and the same question was bandied about in reference to Michigan.

It's important, I believe, to consider these examples of bogged down projects on their own and not as indicators of any larger trends — positive or negative — relating to golf course development.

Even more important is making the separation between the reality of politics and actual opposition.

There's a journalist here in Maine who writes a column each week entitled "Politics and Other Mistakes." Readers would be wise to remember that politics sit at the core of nearly all such disputes, whereas the fates of various endangered marigolds and ladybugs usually show up once the battle has been joined.

On the surface, the Biwabik project looks to be a large-scale hoo-hah over rare strawberries, pesticide fates and the decline of Minnesota's song bird population. But after a few calls to the half-dozen people driving each side of the controversy, the political struggle comes shining through.

To wit: The course was approved by the St. Louis county Planning Commission. Bigwigs at the state Department of Natural Resources, miffed they were not consulted thoroughly, motioned for an Environmental Impact Study (EIS) prior to construction.

Again, this doesn't seem unusual. However, in Minnesota, never has a golf course project been subjected to the scrutiny of



Hal Phillips, editor

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Bravo! Browner and EPA tackle muddled peer-review process

It is said that Oliver Wendall Holmes once led President Lincoln through the battle lines. At one point, the President exposed himself to enemy fire and Holmes shouted, "Get down, you fool!"

Now, I don't think Holmes was disrespectful of the President. He was just reacting to the dangerous situation. In the same way, for years scientists have been saying to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): "Get down, you fools!"

Now, it appears, EPA has finally "gotten down." EPA Administrator Carol Browner has, for instance, declared that science peer-review procedures (until now non-existent) will be in effect Sept. 30 (See story, page 1). She has apparently dedicated her administration to "good science" and directed her division leaders to the process of getting the peer-review mechanism done. Could this be a sign of better things to come?

Let's hope so, because whose information have the leaders at EPA been relying on, anyhow?

Obviously not their own research. They seem unaware of the Cape Cod Study, for instance, and they were in charge of that effort. Remember the Alar scare? The dioxin misinformation? The 2,4,5-T fallacy?

Indeed, a panel of scientists appointed by the General Accounting Office told the EPA in March 1992: "The science at EPA is of uneven quality, and as a result, the agency's policies are frequently perceived as lacking strong scientific support." Lack of a solid peer review process has held the agency hostage to that "uneven science," the GAO said.

While some people may call our friends at EPA "eco-gestapo," I don't think these maligned folks are "bad people." There are explanations for the sometimes muddled, sometimes baffling, sometimes curious, sometimes unrelentingly foolhardy behavior emanating from the offices of EPA. At times, some of them may have been misinformed or misled, and did not realize what they were doing. Some may have been blinded by power and/or political ideology. Some may have been pawns.



Mark Leslie, managing editor

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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Langhorne, PA 19047
215-788-7112

United Publications, Inc.
Publishers of specialized business and consumer magazines.
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Letters

AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPEAL

To the editor:

I have been in the golf business as a course owner for 15 years. I have always tried to keep up with golf course equipment, chemicals and environmental developments.

It irritates me to hear or read "the sky is falling" comments regarding the application of chemicals on golf courses and how bad golf courses are on the environment. It's frustrating to read that golf course operators don't care about the environment.

I have not personally applied any chemicals to my golf course. I've always left that to my expert golf course superintendent. I've never directed him to apply more of any chemical than was absolutely necessary.

I'm involved with a small group who is making a golf facility proposal to the city council of a small California city. The proposal includes a large driving range and nine short golf holes ranging between 80-150 yards. All the top soil will be imported.

This project would be a good possibility as a long-term test site to study the residue from chemical application to turf grasses. It is possible to engineer the entire site to collect the excess water for testing and reuse. Please understand I know just enough about this to get myself into lots of trouble.

I have a question for you.

Can you please direct me to companies, universities, associations, environmental groups and/or individuals who may be interested in participating in such a project?

Incidentally, I read every copy of *Golf Course News* almost cover-to-cover.

Dan James
Foster City, Calif.

Ed. If readers have ideas on where Mr. James should look for answers, contact the *Golf Course News* office.

VERTI-DRAIN PRESIDENT ADDRESSES ATTACHMENT

To the editor:

As a long-time reader and advertiser in *Golf Course News*, we have always had respect for the timeliness and appropriateness of the articles that appear in your publication.

However, we would like to clarify some points regarding an article that appeared in your April issue by Patrick O'Brien [director of the USGA Green Section, Southeast Section] entitled "Burns' invention greatly increases deep aeration."

Mr. Burns developed an attachment that fits on our Verti-Drain and has had great success with it; we applaud his initiative. We have numerous other accounts of satisfied customers who have

adapted the Verti-Drain to unusual applications and developed special attachments. Not all of these cases are as successful as Mr. Burns' case seems to be.

To be clear to our other customers and to our many distributors around the country, we must state that we have never tested or physically seen Mr. Burns' invention. Therefore we cannot, with certainty, attest to its results or its compatibility with our machines. As you can well imagine, the tolerances for a machine that drives tines deep into the soil, and then pitches (heaves) the tines forward is very critical. Therefore it is our policy to field test and have our engineering staff review all attachments so that we can stand behind our products with confidence.

Of course, we would be happy to test Mr. Burns' invention for approval, but until that time it cannot be officially endorsed or authorized as a factory-approved product attachment.

As you can imagine, many superintendents rely on our machines to relieve severe turf problems, so we are very critical of ourselves because we know thousands of customers are depending on us and the Verti-Drain.

Thanks for your understanding of our position on this issue.

Charles J. Otto, president
Emrex, Inc., North American Representatives for Verti-Drain

BOAT MISSED ON LEGENDS GROUP STORY?

To the editor:

Before I chastise you for what I believe to be major omissions in an extremely important story, I want you to know that I have been a big fan of *Golf Course News* for quite a while, and will continue to be.

My concern is that your writer, Peter Blais, and you, really missed the boat in reporting the announcement by The Legends Group, of Myrtle Beach, S.C., that they are starting construction on, not one, but two golf courses in Williamsburg, Va. (*Golf Course News*, June 1994). Furthermore, they went on to say that they will continue to build golf courses there, until they have built as many as seven new courses.

With the continued sad state of golf course financing and new starts for golf courses, especially resort courses, this story should have been a front-page feature article, with editorial support. Instead, your piece came across, at least to me, as rather "Ho hum! Some guys from Myrtle Beach are going to build a couple of courses with some big landowner in Williamsburg."

Mr. Blais did include the basic facts of the story, and he obviously made an attempt at interviewing the principals. There are,

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Phillips commentary

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an EIS. In fact, never has a course been subject to the lesser scrutiny of an Environmental Assessment Worksheet, or EAW.

The state DNR felt left out, its feelings hurt.

In turn, the county feels singled out, over-scrutinized and insulted.

Herein lies the dispute. It has nothing to do with the potentially endangered barren strawberry, which may or may not be present on the site. It has everything to do with government weenies protecting their turf, to the chagrin of

architect Jeff Brauer and Minnesota taxpayers, who must foot the bill for adjudication.

In this case, the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board ruled the DNR did not have jurisdiction over the St. Louis County approval process. Case closed?

Nope... Sometimes, when weenies have their hackles up, one adjudication is not enough.

Only a few days after the DNR lost its argument, a citizens group — armed with many of the trumped-up arguments no longer useful to DNR — sued the state in an effort to stop the golf project. In fact, according to Minnesota's

deputy attorney general, several DNR employees have joined the citizens group.

Apparently, these particular weenies don't know when to quit.

It's easy to get discouraged when a conscientious, quality project like Giants Ridge can be stymied by a bunch of hyper-sensitive DNR engineers who — had their turf not been infringed upon — might instead be fumbling around their St. Paul offices, obsessing over their new pocket protectors or the office shortage of four-color pens.

Developers may see the Giants Ridge debacle and swear off golf

forever, muttering that malls and condos are decidedly less troublesome. While the temptation to extrapolate from the Giants Ridge situation to other Minnesota golf proposals is substantial, don't do it.

More often than not — even in Minnesota — golf projects get the go-ahead. Need proof? Just look at the 670 golf projects currently under construction nationwide.

[Consider the financing example, which is sort of parallel: For two years in the early 90s, a good many developers were scared off by the reported paucity of financing. Well, *somebody* was securing financing because 358

courses opened in 1993 — and those somebodies are making a killing!]

Submitted for your approval: If a third party had approached the Minnesota DNR early in the process and briefed the weenies on plans for Giants Ridge, would the course be under construction today? Dollars to donuts, it would.

Sometimes stroking a particular politician or agency isn't enough. Sometimes you, the developer, must bring together feuding weenies from separate agencies who can't decide just who has ultimate authority.

One petulant pol, a single aggravated agency chairman can put the kibosh on the best conceived plans. Remember that politics and, more specifically, politicians can be truly annoying, but they're here to stay.

There's a myth that politicians are elected to solve our problems. More often than not, we must solve theirs.

Georgia flooding

Continued from page 3

runs through Warner Robins.

"A lot of silt and debris washed up on the course from the creeks. But we only closed for a day. We'll be cleaning up for a while."

Courses closer to Macon fared better. A 10-yard-wide creek swelled to 50 yards during the heaviest downpours, according to Richard Trenaman, assistant pro at Barrington Hall Golf Course. Holes 6, 9, 10 and 18 flooded, forcing the course to close for three days. The 18th closed for a week. Several traps washed out and are in need of repair.

"Otherwise, the only major damage was a downed tree on the 9th hole," Trenaman said. "It was in a strategic location about 150 yards out, making it difficult to get to the green in two. Otherwise, we were pretty fortunate."

Thirteen inches of rain fell on Riverside Country Club in Macon over a three-day period, according to head mechanic Rob Copley.

Sitting astride but high above the Ocmulgee allowed the course to escape damage from the flood-swollen river. But rising water levels in the creeks meandering through the course turned a low plateau area on the 11th hole into a sandbar while washing out one side of a 30-foot bridge.

At Houston Lake CC 30 miles south of Macon, an earthen dam holding back a 200-acre lake gave way, draining the course's main water supply.

"It was also the course's main feature," O'Brien said. "It was fresh water, so the course wasn't damaged. But it's going to cost them a lot to repair it. And they're going to be without water for awhile."

Superintendent Scott Palmer said no one has estimated the cost of replacing the dam or whether it will be possible to obtain the building permits to rebuild it. Meanwhile, he plans to dig a well for water.

"We got something like 12 inches of rain in 16 hours. We were lucky it wasn't worse," he said.

GOLF COURSE NEWS

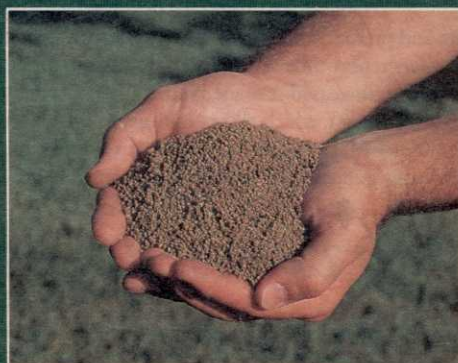
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