Red tape in Minnesota

Several times during the course of writing my story on Verti-Drain (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 asked about in reference to Michigan.

It’s important, I believe, to consider these examples of bogged down projects on a larger scale as indicators of 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.

I asked a turfgrassie 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 booh-hoo over rare strawberries, pesticide fatalities 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... Continued on page 34

Letters

AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPEAL

To the editor:

I have always applied any chemicals to my golf course as a course owner for 15 years. I have always tried to keep up with golf course equipment, chemicals and environmental developments. It seems to me that the "sky is falling" comments regarding the application of chemicals on golf courses and how bad golf courses are on the environment, is 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 have always trusted that we know the best thing for the environment.

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.

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

VERTI-DRAIN PRESDENT 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. The article, "Burns’ invention greatly in... Continued on page 36

Bravo! Browner and EPA tackle muddled peer-review process

It is said that Oliver Wendell Holmes once led President Dwight Eisenhower to a meeting by asking the President to expose himself to enemy and Holmes shouted, "Get down, you fool!"

Now, I don’t think Holmes was disrespectful of the President. He was merely pointing out 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," at least acknowledged Peter Browner has, for instance, that declared science called peer-review procedures (until now non-existent) will be in effect Sept. 30 (See story, page 1). She has apparently been doing something about "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? I hope so, because whose information have the leaders at EPA been hiding, an any way?

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 GEO said.

While some people may call our friends at EPA "ego-gestapo," I don’t think these misguided folks are "bad people." There are experts who have sometimes muddled, sometimes baffled, sometimes curious, sometimes unrelentingly foolishly 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.

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. In other words, the 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.

Blais did include the basic facts of the story, and he obviously made an attempt at interviewing the principals. There are... Continued on next page
A tale of two projects: North, South, fast-forward & slow-going

By A. JOHN HARVEY

The Robert Trent Jones Co., continuing its long association with Roger Rulewich and myself — we were lead designers for Anglebrook Golf Club in Somers, N.Y., and the 18-course Robert Trent Jones Trail in Alabama — took half the time (about three years) for our office to design. The Trail involved alliances with local governments and the public for development of what was positively received as Alabama’s tourism treasure.

Yes, there are merits to a formal environmental review process. But much of the outcry against building and managing golf courses is emotional, non-scientific-based subjectivity.

In September 1988, RTJ helped the partnership of Mitsu Fudosan (New York, Inc.), and Kajima International, Inc., evaluate potential golf course properties in Westchester County, N.Y. After an exhaustive search, a 240-acre parcel was chosen for a private, 18-hole course in the town of Somers. Our office was commissioned to design the course for the newly formed partnership, Somers Golf Associates (SGA). As we developed routes in coordination with the client’s engineers, Divney Consulting of White Plains, N.Y., we soon learned of the site’s environmental sensitivity and how these limitations, in effect, compartmentalized the site into uplands and lowland basins.

Uplands were composed mainly of wooded expanses and abandoned agricultural fields isolated by rock walls, while lowland basins were created by the flow at the bottom of the two major watersheds.

In Alabama, on several occasions our office was involved with the Robert Trent Jones Sr., based in Montclair, N.J., and Kajima International, Inc., evaluating potential golf courses in Westchester County, N.Y. After an exhaustive search, a 240-acre parcel was chosen for a private, 18-hole course in the town of Somers. Our office was commissioned to design the course for the newly formed partnership, Somers Golf Associates (SGA). As we developed routes in coordination with the client’s engineers, Divney Consulting of White Plains, N.Y., we soon learned of the site’s environmental sensitivity and how these limitations, in effect, compartmentalized the site into uplands and lowland basins. Uplands were composed mainly of wooded expanses and abandoned agricultural fields isolated by rock walls, while lowland basins were created by the flow at the bottom of the two major watersheds.

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