Merit Club’s 320 acres protected as open space

GURNEE, Ill. — Bert Getz, owner of the Merit Club here, has announced the 320-acre, 21-hole golf course has been protected as permanent open space.

Getz recently granted a conservation easement to Corlands, the real estate affiliate of the non-profit Chicago-based Openlands Project. Regardless of any changes in ownership, the land will retain its natural character for perpetuity. The gently rolling course features wetland and prairie restorations, scenic open spaces and thousands of trees. It is a member of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System.

"When I decided to convert our family farm into the Merit Club, the goal all along was to save the scenic and natural character of the land," said Getz. "I've owned the property for 25 years and didn't want to see it paved or roofed over. Granting a conservation easement completes my efforts to save the site's beauty for future generations."

Getz began working with Corlands to establish the easement in 1991. Details of the arrangement were finalized this fall. "The Merit Club is a particularly exciting project for Corlands," said Tom Hahn, the organization's director. "Not only is it a model in environmentally sensitive golf course design, but it also sets an example for other owners who realize that the open space their courses provide in areas of rapid growth is invaluable."

The easement eliminates the potential for any commercial/office or residential development on the 320-acre site. Buildings may only be constructed in two designated "Maintenance" and "Club House Facility" zones (totaling 15 acres) and must be directly related to operation of the golf course. If the golf course operation ceases for any reason, the land must remain open and be allowed to revert to its natural state.

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Endangered Species Act expected to expand protected animals and plants

'There is no doubt that species under the current act are often listed too late — rather than too soon — resulting in more expensive recoveries.'

— Ecologist David Wilcove

Lawrence Turner, Washington, D.C.-based program manager for the EPA's Endangered Species Protection Program. "Or, if the EPA determines that an insect happens to be a pollinator of an endangered plant nearby, that too, could do it," Turner said.

According to Don Knott, a senior vice president at Robert Trent Jones II in Palo Alto, Calif., the appearance of the checker spot butterfly was enough to completely destroy plans for the development of a $10 million golf course in California's Santa Mateo County.

And in Washington's Puget Sound, he said, the discovery of an eagle scotched development of a $30 million project that would have featured 36 holes and substantial tracts of housing.

"Unfortunately, there are a lot of anti-growth groups who are using the Endangered Species Act as an excuse to stop development like these," Knott said.

Existing golf courses are also constantly at risk, pro-business interests argue, because state and federal rulings on new endangered species rulings often place new limits — or even outright bans — on the chemicals they use to control weeds and pests.

"Right now, most herbicides are at risk under the act," said John Thorne, a researcher who tracks pest chemical regulation for the National Agricultural Chemicals Association in Washington, D.C. "And while 755 species are currently listed as endangered, we anticipate 400 more will soon be added."

In all, 3,800 new species are being considered for listing under the act, Thorne said.

Those who believe the Endangered Species Act too often coddles rare bugs at the expense of human beings can take heart in HR 1490.

It's a House bill offered up by House Rep. Bill Tauzin (D-Louisiana), that is supposed to represent a middle ground between pro-growth and anti-growth forces.

Specifically, Tauzin said his approach would rewrite the act so regulators could take more of a preventive, rather than "emergency-room" approach to species preservation.

The new rules would accomplish this, he said, by developing cooperative management agreements between government and private landowners, environmentalists, and other interested parties which would track and attempt to protect at-risk species even before they are listed as endangered.

Moreover, Tauzin said he would only allow "verifiable science" to be used in classifying a species as endangered. And he wants to guarantee golf courses and other businesses a right to independent peer reviews for any proposed ruling that would stop development, or limit the methods and tools they now use to fight pests.

In essence, Tauzin said his legislative alternative would create "an Endangered Species Act that works better for all species, including people."