

By PAT JONES

Golf's Environmental Principles merit your attention, retention

You may have blinked recently and missed one of the more important developments in the modern history of our industry. Last April, without much fanfare, the Environmental Principles for Golf Courses in the United States were adopted and endorsed by almost 20 major golf associations and environmental groups. The Principles are voluntary guidelines designed to promote responsible siting, design, construction and management. Here's a typical passage from the section on maintenance:

"Store and handle all pest control and nutrient products in a manner that minimizes worker exposure and/or the potential for point or non-point source pollution. Employ proper chemical storage practices and use suitable personal protective equipment."

Not exactly Earth-shattering stuff, huh? That's basically the way the rest of the document reads. From the superintendent's or architect's perspective, it's pretty much

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common-sense professionalism. If you're not already doing this stuff, you should probably find a new line of work.

In some of the more controversial sections, there are a lot of what one environmental representative half-seriously called "weasel" phrases, such as "when appropriate" and "if feasible." These were inserted at key points when the industry was concerned about the principles being interpreted to strictly — that they could be used to stop a good project.

So, are the principles just a bunch of vague, unenforceable mush? The Sierra Club thought so and that's why they were one of the few environmental groups not to endorse them.

But it's wrong to dismiss the principles because of what they aren't. Instead, we should celebrate what they are. You must look beyond the words to find the real value of the principles.

1. They fill an enormous void. Canada and several European countries have had principles or guidelines for years. The United States was conspicuously absent. Why? Because some in the U.S. golf com-



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munity feared that, if we endorsed any guidelines, they would quickly become law and the bureaucrats and lawyers would put us out of business. That's why the principles had to be voluntary to gain endorsement from the various golf groups.

But more important, nature abhors a vacuum. Without national guidelines, local governments were creating their own very restrictive rules. The regulations adopted in Baltimore and Santa Clara County, Calif., are so tough they almost prohibit new construction. The simple existence of a set of cooperatively developed principles makes it less likely that goofy, one-sided regulations and restrictions will continue to pop up around the country.

(A side note: some in golf — particularly developers who had experienced the wrath of environmental activists — kept asking, "Why are we doing this?" Our best answer was, "If we don't do it, somebody else will do it for us and we won't like what we get.")

2. The principles are a kind of

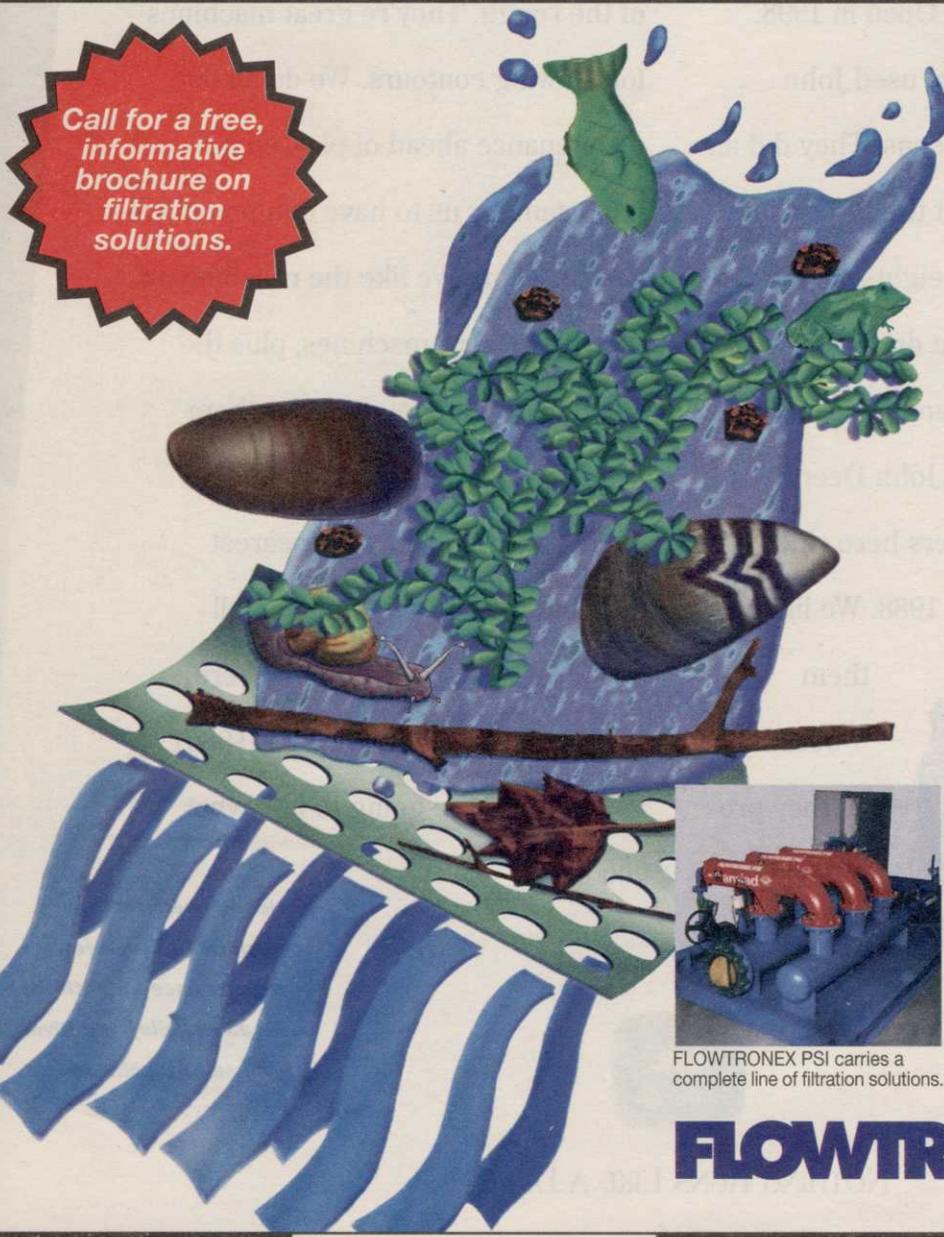
treaty. For the first time, major environmental groups that had previously been highly critical of golf went on the record saying that a well-developed, well-managed golf course can actually be an environmental asset. Wow! Suddenly Ron Dodson and Audubon International were no longer alone among environmentalists in affirming what we've believed all along.

So, from that perspective, the principles are more of a treaty document than a set of specific "best management practices." They are a public acknowledgment that the golf industry and the environmental community have a mutual interest. We didn't agree on everything, but we found a way to agree on most things. That has tremendous value in terms of public perception.

3. It's an educational document. Let's face it, developers have been known not to anticipate environmental issues until after ground's been broken — and they've paid the price with delays, bad public relations and higher costs. Further, how much of the local opposition to courses has been based on misperceptions and invalid assumptions about standard industry practices? The principles will help to educate people on both sides.

4. It's a unique achievement. During the final conference at which the principles were rolled out, one of the environmental delegates said, "The golf industry

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FILTRATION

Who Needs It?

If you're a golf course superintendent, then you probably do.

The fact is, water quality is an issue for most superintendents. The fresh water you're pumping may still contain anything from Algae to Zebra Mussels. Or local regulations might require that your course use effluent as an irrigation water supply.

While effluent water is "safe" for irrigation it still contains a high level of nutrients. Sitting in your irrigation pond this water can quickly explode into an algae farm. If you're pumping unfiltered effluent, imagine having to remove and clean every clogged sprinkler head on the course. Now imagine doing it every month.

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Phillips comment

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now and Jan. 1. Because we publish our handy-dandy Buyer's Guide in December, I figured I would alert you net-thusiasts now, in order that you might enjoy the site during the holiday season. As we all know, there's nothing like washing down a good mole cricket story with a little egg nog...

Why hasn't *Golf Course News* been on-line until now? Well, it took time to find the right Internet provider (you folks who haven't dealt with these characters will more fully understand what I mean when you make your own inevitable on-line jump). Also, we wanted GCN On-Line to be something really special — not just another run-of-the-mill web site with standard graphics and content.

GCN On-Line will be different. Breaking news. Previews of upcoming issues. Eye-popping

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is now on the leading edge of environmental responsibility in this country." Think about that for a minute. How many industries have done what we did? In short, the principles put us way ahead of the curve.

Frankly, the successful principles effort should have garnered more national media attention. It's a great story of an entire industry working cooperatively and proactively to protect the environment. But, hey, as the old newsroom saying goes, "Good news is no news." The non-golf media are still far more interested in our industry's one alleged ghost (Lt. George Prior of chlorothonil fame) than in something enormously positive like this. What a pity.

5. We built relationships. While the process of negotiating the principles language was a tremendous drain on both sides, it also brought the people and organizations closer together. Consider, for example, the fact that Dr. Jay Feldman, head of National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides, sent me a holiday greeting card last Christmas. GCSAA even hosted one of the coalition's board meetings at the Lawrence headquarters.

Now consider that, just a year earlier, the cover of NCAMP's magazine had featured an illustration of a giant skull-and-crossbones superimposed over a golfer!

Everyone in golf should be proud of the principles. They may not be an exact road map for environmental responsibility, but they do represent something much greater: a mutual commitment to preserving the environment without damaging the game's vitality and integrity.

graphics. Links to oodles of other golf sites. This will be the complete package — true forum of ideas and opinions.

Look for it.

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It's interesting to note that course management companies, not the architects themselves, have taken issue with a particular golf hole's trade dress. While the owners of Pebble Beach, Harbour Town and Pinehurst

have objected to the duplication of their golf holes at Houston's Tour 18 Golf Club (see story page 37), there's no way to ask, say, Donald Ross whether he approves of developers replicating his designs. Jack Neville, the designer of Pebble Beach who passed away in 1978, cannot be reached for comment, either.

However, Ed Seay, whose Bay Hill design (with Arnold Palmer), was duplicated at

Houston's Tour 18, says it's all a matter of perspective.

"Now, I can see an owner getting upset," Seay opines. "If someone has paid a very large price for uniqueness, for exclusivity, they have a reasonable right for that to be honored. But I think if a designer's upset with it, they're a little insecure. I would consider it a compliment. Don't you want people to enjoy your work?"

Dennis Wilkerson, owner and chief shareholder of Tour 18, not surprisingly agrees with Seay.

"Maybe I'm just an ol' country boy, but I thought the other courses would find it flattering — to be named in a collection of the greatest golf holes," Wilkerson says. "I think some of [the owners of the original courses] must have found it flattering, but the other three didn't like me advertising their resorts."



MICHAEL LEE TALKS:

GREENS MOWERS

"We just hosted the Andersen

Consulting World Championship of

Golf this summer and are gearing up

for the U.S. Women's Open in 1998.

Like we do all year, we used John

Deere 220s on our greens. They did an

excellent job—even at the low cutting

heights we mowed

at during the tour-

nament. We've

used John Deere

walkers here since

1988. We like

them

because

they pro-

vide a

quality cut over our undulating sur-

faces. We also have 2653s mowing

around greens, tees, and some areas

of the rough. They're great machines

for mowing contours. We do all our

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important for us to have equipment we

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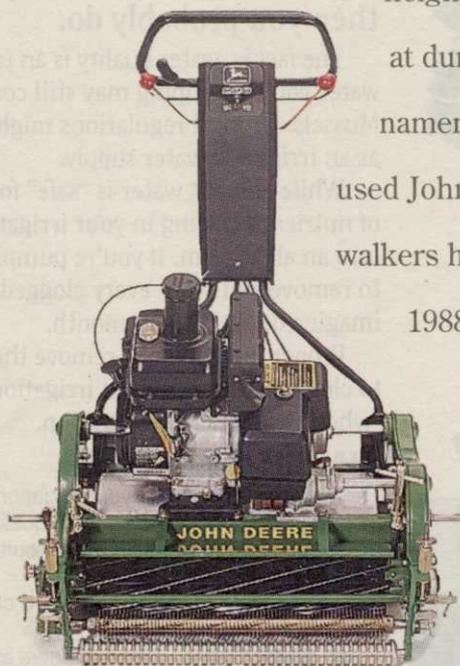
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