Audubon Int'l dives into development with a splash

Aims to plan and build 100 golf course facilities

By MARK LESLIE

ELKIRK, N.Y. — When Audubon International (AI) entered the world of golf, no one would have dreamed of the heights it is about to reach — no one except, perhaps, President Ron Dodson.

AI has created the Audubon International Golf and the Environment Land Trust to accept "real property interest" that will be used to facilitate development of Audubon golf courses as environmental research and demonstration centers.

"We asked, Who better to implement our beliefs than us?" said Dodson. "One

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Backers ready to pour in $300M to $500M

By MARK LESLIE

ELKIRK, N.Y. — In its quest to develop perhaps 100 golf courses, the Audubon International Golf and the Environment Land Trust has found a number of individuals and two major federal government agencies offering land, and a partner has stepped forward to finance, develop and operate those facilities. Contracts could be signed by the end of this year.

While the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Land Reclamation (BLR) are offering up tracts of land across the country, a newly created firm,

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Corps' flip on wetlands regs will have wide impact

By MARK LESLIE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has changed a wetlands permitting regulation that will affect commercial and residential developers across the board.

Probably 10 percent of golf course projects built the last few years would have been affected by the new parameters had they been in effect, according to Dr. Stuart Cohen, president of Environmental & Turf Services, Inc. of Wheaton, Md.

The regulation is Nation Wide Permit (NWP) 26, which is routinely re-issued every few years. In recent years, it has

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Diablo es mas Grande

By MICHAEL LEVANS

WEST STANISLAUS COUNTY, Calif. — When Jack Nicklaus and Gene Sarazen team up on a course design, you know there's something big happening.

The two legends have put their heads together for the first time on the design of The Legends West Course, one of two course projects built the last few years would have been affected by the new parameters had they been in effect, according to Dr. Stuart Cohen, president of Environmental & Turf Services, Inc. of Wheaton, Md.

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The Golf Company, has stepped forward as Audubon International’s (AI) colleague. The partnership promises to be the most significant windfall of new golf course construction in the history of the game.

Saying that AI President Ron Dodson’s forecast of 100 courses “is pretty aggressive,” The Golf Company President Stan Waterhouse nevertheless added: “We will build as many as makes sense. We have the resources to do whatever’s necessary.”

Waterhouse, a former regional vice president for ClubCorp. of America, said: “But by the end of the year, we will have signed some contracts for projects. They will be under construction sometime next year.”

“I don’t know if we’ll do one, two, or five at a time — it depends,” said Dodson from his headquarters here. “We’ve already looked at properties in Missouri, Florida and Arizona.”

The BLR and Corps of Engineers both operate under a mandate that they shall, as appropriate, provide public access and recreation to lands under their management. The Bureau is responsible for water and works west of the Mississippi River and manages thousands of acres, much of it along water corridors.

Waterhouse predicted that many individuals will also offer land for Audubon golf courses. One on the east coast of Florida has already offered a 20,000-acre property.

The key link to all these groups is maintaining effective environmental stewardship on each property:

• The Golf Company’s corporate structure embraces Audubon environmental principles.

“...It’s personally important to me and it’s part of the basis for our company,” said Waterhouse, who once managed a Canadian course and Robert Trent Jones Golf Course, both of which won Environmental Stewardship Awards. “We believe very strongly that golf and the environment are inextricably linked. The growth of the future of golf is clearly tied to how well we do our job with regards to environmental issues. If we don’t, we won’t be able to build any more. That’s been pretty obvious...

“The principles are simple. Basically, you do the right stuff with the land and resources you’re involved with. In a corporate sense, it doesn’t make sense to build environmentally sensitive golf courses and then create radioactive waste.”

• Each property would join Audubon International’s Golf Signature Program — the organization’s premier environmental plan which starts operating on a project before a course is sited and designed.

• An Audubon land trust team will be involved in a project from its inception. As Dodson said: “We essentially will become the environmental conscience of the project from the point of view of land-use management, habitat restoration and water and wildlife.”

Dodson envisions a phased approach to development. Once a piece of property is proposed as a site, The Golf Company would inspect it and decide if, demographically and from a golfer’s point of view, it is viable.

If the land gets a go-ahead, the company would perform an economic analysis and a team from Sienna College and the Audubon Institute would do “a full-blown environmental assessment encompassing the lay of the land, hydrology, geology, types of habitat and the watershed,” Dodson said, as well as bring in an attorney to look at the permitting process and how it might affect the economics of the project.

After this phase Audubon will be able to say if the project should proceed or be dropped.

As Waterhouse explained: “Audubon is a participant, but they don’t have the expertise or wherewithal to put a project together. They need someone on the business side of the deal, and that’s the relationship we’re trying to establish.”

The intention is for all the courses to be public-access and affordable.

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