Is golf getting greener?

By TODD MILLER

Since our first conference, there is now a much better understanding of how golf courses and the environment can be compatible. Aiding in this better understanding is the work of a national committee of golfing and environmental interests. It has worked to organize two national conferences that served as a catalyst for discussing golfing and environmental issues; prepared Environmental Principles for Golf Courses in the United States that provide a framework for how golf can coexist with a healthy environment; and drafted performance measures and a collaboration guide that should assist in the use of the principles.

Membership on this national committee is diverse. It includes representatives of the U.S. Golf Association, the Golf Course Superintendents Association, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Wildlife Federation, NC Coastal Federation, and others. The Center for Resource Management, based in Salt Lake City, has coordinated the work of this project.

The committee made substantial progress by advocating environmental principles for planning and siting of golf courses, design, construction, maintenance, facility operations, and golfer education. Golfers and environmentalists involved in this effort agree that there are two basic ways to prevent environmental damage from golf courses.

First, golf courses must be properly planned, sited, and designed. They acknowledged that the presence and extent of some types of sensitive environments may render certain locations unsuitable for a golf course. Second, once the golf course is designed, it must be constructed, maintained and operated based upon local environmental conditions. Even golf courses that are well constructed, managed and operated can have unacceptable negative environmental impacts if they are located in the wrong place.

Over the last five years, I have been extremely impressed by the commitment of golf course superintendents to minimize the impact their courses have on the environment. I've also had the opportunity to work with some of the leading golf course designers in the country. They have demonstrated to me that good design can avoid environmental damage. The initiative shown by many leaders in the golfing industry could serve as a role model for other industries once tangible environmental results are demonstrated. But translating the environmental principles into real environmental protection is still a formidable task, particularly since we have made no progress improving the process by which sites are selected for new courses in coastal North Carolina.

For example, a golf course currently under construction in...
Brunswick County illustrates the need for better siting, design and construction standards. This course was sited and designed to attract real estate development. The magnitude of this attraction is described in the article entitled, “Land Rush: Sales Boom at Brunswick County Golf Communities.” The article discusses the growth of golf courses and the associated real estate development. The environmental and golfing community should strive for a balance between development and conservation, with the objective of managing the area's resources responsibly.

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