USGA extends research into 21st century

By MARK LESLIE

Far Hills, N.J. — Buoyed by progress in "genetic transformation" of turfgrasses, discoveries on the environmental impact of golf and various other projects, the U.S. Golf Association (USGA) Green Section is preparing for another round of research funding.

Having poured $17 million into research in the last 17 years, the Green Section Research Committee sent out a call for proposals in late May and expects to make final decisions on projects in November, according to Green Section National Director Jim Snow.

The USGA doubled the research budget in 1990 when it added environmental projects to the mix. With many of those environmental questions now answered, the USGA will re-concentrate its efforts on "working with a lot of different grasses — including some native types that haven't been traditionally used on golf courses — and developing the grasses for the future that will require less pesticide and water use," Snow said. "Also, we're spending a fair amount of money on genetic transformation."

The new funding will be a little different than in the past because the Research Committee will select projects for two- or three-year periods.

There is $200,000 per year in the budget for projects that will begin next year, but more than $500,000 per year for those starting in 2001, Snow said. Some of those studies will be renewed if necessary.

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Russell discovers: Yes, you can go home again

By PETER BLAIR

Bandon, Ore. — Troy Russell grew up on a dairy farm in the neighboring town of Coquille, four miles from Bandon Dunes. In fact, as a teenager, Russell raced motorcycles on the eventual course site, which was then called The Circus.

"Lo and behold, now I work here," said the 40-year-old head superintendent of Bandon Dunes, the southern Oregon links-style course hard on the Pacific Ocean.

The Gleneagles Development Corp. layout opened this spring to rave reviews and is expected to be among the finalists for top new course in various media polls. Golfweek already voted Bandon Dunes among its top resort courses and among the top 10 courses overall to open in the past 40 years.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't feel a little pressure [to keep the course maintained in line with the accolades]," Russell added. "We just try to go out and do what we do. As long as they (management) allow us to keep doing our job, we're perfectly happy." Russell knew at a young age he didn't want to be a dairy farmer and eventually gave up motocross ("An ambulance ride ended my motorcycle career," he said). But while he left the dairy farm and bike racing behind, he never lost his attraction to the southern Oregon coast.

"I love it here," said Russell, whose parents still live on the nearby farm where he grew up. "But when I was 18, I didn't want to farm and the only other thing here was the timber economy. I didn't want to work in the woods or mill, so I went off to pursue other things."

Bandon Dunes was raising golfers' expectations even before it was completed.

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GOLF AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Flying high

Birdwatching Open looks good for golf

By JEAN MacKAY

Do golf courses provide suitable habitat for a diversity of bird species? The results of Audubon International's 1999 North American Birdwatching Open suggest that a great variety of birds can indeed be found on courses. A total of 319 different bird species were sighted in this year's one-day bird count, held May 8 to coincide with International Migratory Bird Day.

Forty-eight courses in the United States and Canada participated in the event. Because all participating courses are certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries or Audubon Signature Sanctuaries, the North American Golf Course Bird Watching Open generated valuable data about the types of species found on courses that are managed with wildlife and the environment in mind.

For the second year in a row, The Club at Seabrook Island in South Carolina soared to the top of the list of participants, having poured $17 million into research in the last 17 years, the Green Section Research Committee sent out a call for proposals in late May and expects to make final decisions on projects in November, according to Green Section National Director Jim Snow.

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