TEXAS GOLF BITES WATER BULLET — OR BITES DUST

By FRANCES G. TRIMBLE

Between April 1 and 3, rain fell in varying amounts across Texas, but even the 2-plus inches in the Houston area was "just noise," a drop in the bucket, according to a National Weather Service representative. The drought statewide was borderline desperate until a few light rains fell in mid-April.

At that time, U.S. Golf Association Green Section agronomist Brian Maloy, based in Dallas, called the recent rainfall "significant."

"In 1999, we were 11 inches under our average precipitation total of 32-36 inches," he said. "Though we have not totally recovered that 11 inches, and while aquifers are still not recharged, we are closer to normal than forecasters predicted."

Maloy noted that several clubs in his area are incorporating larger irrigation ponds in their long-range plans. Some older courses are remodeling on-site ponds and irrigation systems, while others are dredging to remove silt.

"We are still dependent on what (water) we capture," he said. "And even with the rain, there could still be a point this season when superintendents are forced to scale back their water use on the golf course."

However, while turfgrass can eventually recover from a prolonged drought, the dry conditions in Texas are "devastating for trees," according to said Jack Swayze, a forestry expert with Davey Golf Services of Kent, Ohio, who works out of Houston.

"Though we have had some recent rain, the damage is far-reaching and will be with us for years," said Swayze. "Damage caused by such a drought can have a four- to six-year effect, with trees developing secondary diseases brought on by drought stress."

Swayze said trees compete with turfgrass "because they can..."