Florida’s water ‘disappearing,’ governor warns parched state

By JOEL JOYNER
TAMPA, Fla. — Even as Florida rolls through its rainy summer season, water officials continue to press for conservation as drought concerns escalate. The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMWD), for example, has introduced a new, hard-hitting campaign with their “Wasting water is a crime” slogan.

Concerns have reached the highest level. “One of Florida’s most vital resources – water – is disappearing,” warns Gov. Jeb Bush in TV announcements broadcast around the state.

According to weather experts, wet-season rains are just a “drop in the bucket” in recovering Florida’s water supply. Barry major hurricanes, normal rainfalls from June to October will be insufficient to erase the water deficit.

Lake Okeechobee, a vital reservoir, before next winter’s dry season.

District-wide enforcement against water use violators has generated more than $250,000 in fines.

"DRY AS A BONE"

Golf course superintendents, relieved that the wet season has arrived, are still suffering from three years of drought. “It’s getting worse,” said Norman Carmouche, superintendent here at the Palm Ceia Country Club. “We’re still under the phase three category for restrictions.”

Allowed to irrigate fairways only once a week and greens and tees thrice weekly, Carmouche doesn’t anticipate any change. “It’s been dry as a bone here for a long time,” he said.

“We’re an older, more established course, built in 1914,” said Carmouche. “We’ve fared better than most courses in the area because of our shade trees and very little mounding. I played at the TPC at Tampa Bay the other day and, with their mounding, they were really burning up there.”

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Penn State professor seeks to commercialize Poa annua for golf market

By JOEL JOYNER
UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. — Poa annua has few friends.

And why should it? “It’s thought of as a weed, and some people are trying to get rid of it,” said David Huff, associate professor of turfgrass breeding and genetics here at Penn State University.

Oddly enough, Huff is trying to develop a strain of Poa that the market might like. “The truth of it is,” he said, “it plays a big part in the golfing world, but a superinten- dent can’t go out and buy it if he needs it.”

Huff is a staunch advocate of Poa annua putting greens. In his view, its density is greater than that of the newest bentgrasses “by an order of magnitude.”

In one of his test plots, he has counted as many as 1,360 Poa plants in an area the size of a quarter.

His goal is to provide a product that meets golf course standards. “I hope to have a satisfactory Poa product on the market within five years,” he said.

"NUMBER ONE PRIORITY"

After examining about 1,600 strains of Poa annua, Huff and his team have narrowed the candidates down to about 60 strains.

“Two years ago, we decided to make the Poa project our top priority,” Huff said. “We now have varieties that have performed very well on some test plots, and this year we’re placing some on actual greens to test out real-world evaluations and observations. We’re looking to get it down to about 10 to 12 strains.”

Poa is susceptible to pests and diseases and sensitive to heat stresses and

Survey: 63 percent of courses promote wildlife

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Results of the first comprehensive national survey of U.S. golf course management practices show that golf facilities can be maintained in a manner that is compatible with the environment. Nearly 63 percent of the survey respondents indicated that their golf courses are managed specifically for wildlife.

Conducted under the auspices of the Golf and Environment Initiative, the surveys went to 11,000 superintendents who belong to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. The Golf and Environment Initiative is a consortium of more than 20 golf associations and environmental organizations that have been examining the game’s environmental practices since 1995.

“The debate about golf’s impact on the environment has been clouded by a lack of complete and nationally aggregated data,” said GCSSA president Tommy Witt. “That has led pro-golf and anti-golf factions to make assertions that can’t necessarily be supported by fact.”

The survey addressed a number of agronomic and economic issues, including grass types, number of rounds played, length of season and maintenance budgets. “It would be fair to characterize our first effort as solid, but limited,” said Witt. “We collected a tremendous amount of information, but not enough to allow for extensive interpretation.”

To broaden the coverage to a two-year spread, half the superintendents provided information for 1999 and the rest for 2000. Among the survey findings were these:

• An average golf facility covers 150 acres, with 111.5 of that reflected as managed turf.
• 78.8 percent of golf courses have at least one certified pesticide applicator, with an average of two certified applicators per course.

The GCSSA voluntarily surveyed its members in a collaborative effort to build a national database of environmental data for golf courses.

This is an important step in collecting objective data that both the golf industry and the environmental community can evaluate and use to develop environmental conditions on golf courses,” said Paul Parker, executive vice president of the Center for Resource Management.

In addition, facilities owned or controlled an average of 100.3 acres of wildlife habitat:

• The most common form of habitat consists of freshwater bodies (found on 78.8 percent of golf courses), deciduous woodlands (67.9 percent), wetlands (51.9 percent), and streams or rivers (48.9 percent).
• Median golf course irrigation water covers 78 acres, or 70 percent of managed turf areas. The national irrigation median is the equivalent of 3.5 inches applied to irrigated areas per year.
• 85.4 percent of golf courses have at least one certified pesticide applicator, with an average of two certified applicators per course.

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Florida’s water

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Carmouche said. “But it takes a lot of manpower.”

Wells were installed at the course in the 1930s. “They’re pretty salty now,” he added. “There’s nothing like a good rainfall.”

The Orlando area is dealing not just with drought, but also wildfires. “It seems like half of Florida is on fire,” said Earl Leyton, golf course mechanic at the Dubsdread Golf Club in Orlando. “I’ve even had a 1,000-acre fire out by my house.”

Water bodies in the area are hurting badly, too. “I live over in Clermont,” Leyton said, “and there’s a chain of lakes out there that’s no longer a chain. The rivers are all dried up. Lake waterlines are 300 to 400 feet from the docks. It’s really a mess.”

POWDER-DRY ROUGHS

Courses in St. Petersburg also are coping with drought stresses. “The course outskirts are basically powder dry,” said Dave Kane, assistant superintendent at the Renaissance Vinoy Resort. “In early March, we got nearly an inch,” Kane said, “but then we hadn’t had any since January. We’re hurting. This is the worst drought period since they’ve kept records in this area.”

The challenges continue to stack up. “Florida has a lot of sandy soil, so what little rain we’ve gotten so far drains straight down through,” said Kane. “We do use effluent, and we can irrigate our greens, tees and fairways okay. But the problem is that the sodium content gets high. We need rain to flush it out.”

SUPERS STRIVE FOR FLEXIBILITY

In South Florida, phase two restrictions continue to remain in effect even though rainfall conditions are fair. “Temporarily, we’re in great shape,” said Randy Randquist, superintendent at the Boca Rio Golf Course in Boca Raton. “Long term, we still have concerns about water restrictions. “Lake Okeechobee is still real low,” he said. “I believe the levels are around nine feet now, which is the lowest it’s ever been for this time of year. Our real concern is when we get back into the dry season again – especially if restrictions are still in place. And that really hinges on Lake Okeechobee getting some heavy amounts of rain.”

Parts of the 663-square-mile lake have actually caught on fire. Supertendents in South Florida are negotiating with the SFWMD for more flexibility. “They won’t make any changes to phase two restrictions,” said Randquist, “but there is some indication that they may rewrite some rules for a potential phase three situation to offer more flexibility.”

Superintendents may be able to better manage when and how often they irrigate their courses. “If we can show a genuine reduction by using flow-meters, they may be more willing to rewrite those rules,” Randquist said.

Drought conditions are expected to persist in the Southeast through August.

Danneberger launches Superintendents’ Korner

By JOEL JOYNER

COLUMBUS, Ohio — T. Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., professor of turfgrass science at Ohio State University, has launched Superintendents’ Korner, an Internet site for superintendents in the Midwest.

Located on the OSU Web site, SK is designed to cover issues and developments concerning turfgrass in the region. Current topics, called “turfnotes,” are listed on a regular basis and inform superintendents on both abiotic and biotic stresses that occur throughout the growing season.

“I launched it in April, and I think it has been well received,” said Danneberger. “Whenever I make a new posting, I send out an e-mail to those on the SK list.”

The site may be viewed at http://hcs.osu.edu/karl. Turfnotes published so far this year cover a range of topics, everything from red thread, mushrooms in aerification holes, necrotic ring spot and dandelions. Basal rot anthracnose, take-all-patch and dollar spot on bent/Poa fairways round out the list.

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