Drought could threaten Colorado courses in '03

By ANDREW OBERBECK

DENVER, Colo. -- Much of Colorado and the Mountain West remains in the grips of an extreme drought that some scientists say is the worst in 350 years. Drought began hammering the area last summer, causing widespread water restrictions and has shown no sign of letting up this winter. While storms finally hit Denver in February, the area received no measurable precipitation in December and January.

Four City of Denver courses, which usually stay open throughout the winter, have closed due to the dry conditions. Other courses across the region that usually stay open have had to restrict golf cars to roughs and paths or ban them altogether. Courses on the Front Range that traditionally close because of snow cover stayed open longer than ever this year because winter weather did not arrive.

'JUST HOPING TO BE IN BUSINESS'

While the warmer and drier than normal winter is damaging now, many superintendents are increasingly concerned about the impending water shortages and restrictions that could severely impact the upcoming golf season.

Since many courses get water from irrigation canals that run out of the mountains, concern is justified. According to recent reports, snowpack is at about 75 percent of normal and would need to be 125 percent to 150 percent of normal in order to fully replenish the depleted reservoirs.

"One hundred percent of our water comes from irrigation ditches," said Lee Terry, superintendent at Pinehurst Country Club in Denver. "Right now it is running 20 to 30 percent of normal and last year it was dry by the fifth of June.

"I have enough water in my lakes to irrigate the golf course twice, but that's it. I have to wait until they turn the ditches back on or make a special arrangement to get them turned on early," he added. "We are just hoping to be in business at the end of the year."

Westlake Golf Course is the only 18-hole course run by the City of Denver that is still open.

"We have a well and a 15-acre lake that collects stormwater from streets and a surrounding housing development," said superintendent Gregg Blew. "With all that water, I would be shut down just like all the other city courses. They had to close because they use potable water and were restricted to irrigating tees and greens."

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Rocky Mountain GCSA to hold drought seminar

LITTLETON, Colo. -- The Rocky Mountain GCSA will host a drought seminar during the USGA Green Section's regional conference here March 25 at Lakewood Country Club.

Superintendent Gregg Blew, immediate past president of the Rocky Mountain GCSA, is putting together the program that will feature numerous speakers and water experts. USGA regional agronomist Matt Nelson will start the session off by discussing proper cultural practices to use during drought conditions. Officials from the Denver Water Board will address ground water rights and surface water rights, and another speaker will cover conservation measures and future water restrictions.

For more information, contact Gregg Blew at 303-692-5633.

-- Andrew Overbeck

Courses now have to compete for interns

By KEVIN J. ROSS

It wasn't long ago that the hiring process for turfgrass student interns was a relatively easy task. However, with more and more clubs developing internship programs the demand for interns is at an all-time high. What was easy in the past has now turned into an all out recruitment war.

Today, many clubs are battling each other for the top interns in the country. Recruitment used to involve interns coming to the clubs. Now, more and more clubs are visiting colleges and universities to interview interns.

How has competition come about? When the economy was going gangbusters in the mid-90s, hiring golf course workers was an arduous task. At that point many clubs, which previously hadn't had an internship program, started looking at students to take the place of workers they couldn't find. Even though the present economy has softened and there are more workers available, clubs recognized the benefits of turfgrass interns and have kept their programs intact. This has lead to an amazing demand for students. The top turfgrass universities in the United States estimate that 400 to 500 internship announcements are received and posted by the schools each year.

With high demand, students have many more options available. Many have also realized that...