

# THE PUBLIC COURSE 'CRUNCH'

84% of the  
Golfers on  
56% of the  
Courses

The National Golf Foundation has come up with some hard evidence showing the need for additional public golf courses in America. At a time when available facilities are loath to accommodate present golfers, much less the increasing public interest in the sport, NGF presents a survey showing where public course needs are most severe

The need for accelerated growth in the number of public golf courses in America has long been recognized not only by the National Golf Foundation but by a growing number of private investors and forward thinking municipalities.

This need stimulated public and daily fee golf operations to grow at an even greater rate than that of all other course types combined during the past decade. During this period, the total number of golf courses in the United States increased by 63 per cent (from 7,070 in 1962 to 11,374 in 1972), while municipal and daily fee golf operations combined showed an increase of 77 per cent (3,567 in 1962; 6,322 in 1972). But this faster growth rate was insufficient to quench the indicated public demand for more golfing facilities.

In 1962 public golf operations comprised 51 per cent of available courses; in 1972 they advanced only to 56 per cent of the total number of courses available. This means that in 1972, according to NGF estimates, about 84 per cent of the nearly 11 million active golfers in this country were trying to find room to play on 56 per cent of the nation's courses. The widely forecasted population growth, urbanization, more leisure time, increased personal income and greater mobility throughout the country indicate an ever increasing requirement for golf facilities.

NGF says there is a general feeling among golf course operators that some facilities might handle as much as 30 to 40 per cent more play with improved player control, institution of better starting time systems, speedier golf, more extensive promotional efforts and better developed instructional programs for beginners.

It is not within the province of the NGF to initiate private investment in golf facilities. Its role in encouraging the building of more daily fee and municipal courses continues to be one of advising and assisting those who have expressed an interest in a golf course project. The foundation does, however, feel duty-bound to ensure that those responsible for planning government-owned and funded recreational facilities are aware of which areas badly need more public golf courses and of the advantages of including well-designed and operated public golf courses in the over-all plan for public

recreational facilities.

To determine the areas of greatest need, the foundation has formulated a continuing statistical study based on their recommended proportion of 18 holes of public golf per 25,000 people. The population figure for each county in the United States was divided by 25,000 to determine the minimum number of holes for public golf that each county should provide. These figures were then compared to the number of holes needed to meet the 1970 census population requirements. The statistical findings were presented to each NGF development consultant to use as a basis for analyzing his territory in depth and evaluating the problems, needs and potential. This affects the perpetual adjustment of the statistical report (compiled by NGF statistician, Leah Smith) to incorporate variables always created when a "laboratory system" is subjected to practical application.

A few of the many factors the consultants considered are:

1. Is land available? (For example, consider New York City. There is not enough land available within driving distance of the city to provide the number of public golf courses that should ideally be available to eight million people.)
2. Is the land suitable for golf? (Terrain, general climate, availability of water, length of growing season and type of soil, must all be considered.)
3. How many private courses are located in the area? (Are there enough "unattached" golfers available to warrant more public courses?)
4. Does the area have heavy tourist traffic during the golfing season? (Such areas may well need many more public courses than resident population figures might indicate.)
5. What are the local economic facts? (*ie.*, the price of land, tax rate and growth potential).

### Regional Evaluations By NGF Facility Development Consultants

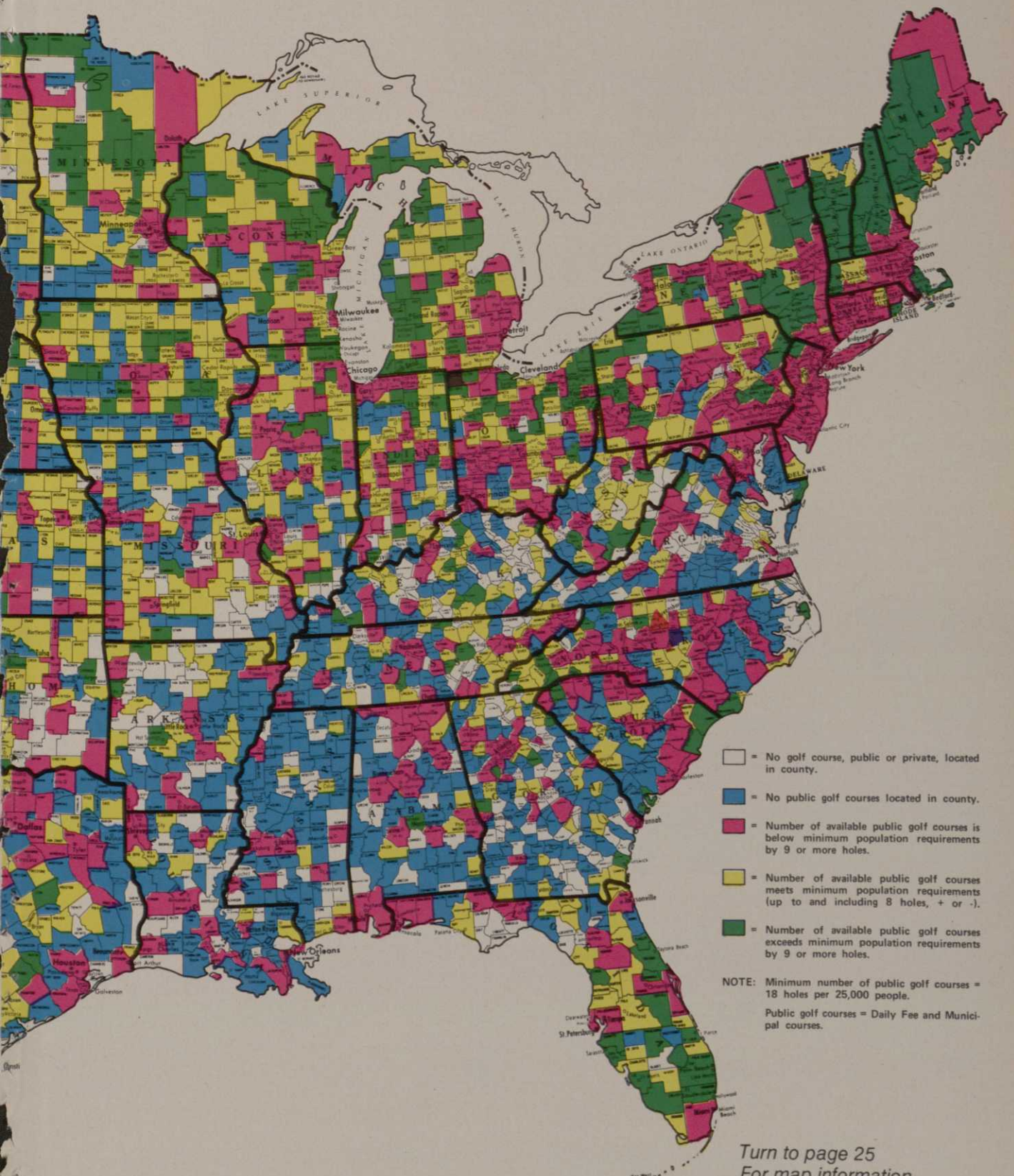
Michael Sheridan, NGF consultant for the New England Region, reports that existing golf (and all other recreational) facilities are overcrowded. Part of the reason says Sheridan, is that many areas in this region relegate recreation to a low priority compared to other public needs. Another reason is that land, albeit generally suited for golf, is very expensive. He urges that

*(text continued on page 25; turn to page 22 for map)*



# TO POPULATION BY COUNTY

SOURCE: National Golf Foundation Statistics,  
October 1, 1972



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future course development be situated on the metropolitan perimeter and perhaps in state regional parks.

NGF senior facility development consultant, Harry C. Eckhoff, reports

that in the Middle Atlantic Region the numerous golf courses, built primarily for the purpose of increasing land values in land development projects, are encountering two serious problems. Golf-real estate projects are often not

professionally designed or constructed, which usually will mean many difficulties for the future course operators. In many cases of this sort, the developer wishes to dispose of the golf facilities once land sales are completed, and the group taking over the operation—golf club, home owner's association, municipality or whoever—often needs assistance in putting the course on sound business footing.

The second problem, says Eckhoff, is that many golf-real estate ventures are slowed or brought to a halt because of lack of funds; some projects have changed hands two or three times before completion. For this section of the country, high priority must be given to saving existing or partially-completed facilities.

NGF consultant, Lawrence A. Smith, reporting on the Southeastern Region, states that until recent years, most states in the deep south had a more sluggish economy than the rest of the nation and a larger proportion of low income population. Under these conditions, says Smith, golf courses were mainly funded by private monies, run as private courses and tended to serve the needs of the area's golfers. However, during the last several years this situation has changed radically. Industry has been encouraged to locate in the South, providing more jobs, tourism has been actively pursued and changing social attitudes toward minority groups has somewhat lowered the former resistance to public recreational facilities of all types.

Fred Stewart, NGF consultant for the Mid-Central Region, says that, although this area has many excellent municipal operations, as well as numerous fine daily fee courses, some of the larger cities have had substantial decreases in play or are operating their municipal courses in the red.

Stewart's research showed this problem was due to rainy weather last year and to inefficient operation and maintenance practices rather than to a loss of interest in golf or a surfeit of golf courses. Helping existing courses to increase play will be a major concern in this region. In the area of new facility development, some cities have indicated they would make sites for new courses available to responsible groups under long-term leases.

NGF Rocky Mountain consultant, Jerry Claussen, in his assessment of the problem priorities for the area, states

### NUMBER OF COUNTIES WITHOUT PUBLIC AND MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSES

State	Number of counties with no public or private golf courses	Number of counties with no public golf courses	Number of counties with no municipal golf courses	Total number of counties in state
Alabama	13	43	56	67
Alaska	27	29	30	30
Arizona	0	0	8	14
Arkansas	18	47	68	75
California	4	6	26	58
Colorado	20	24	35	63
Connecticut	0	0	5	8
Delaware	0	1	2	3
District of Columbia	3	3	3	4
Florida	10	20	48	67
Georgia	46	107	155	159
Hawaii	0	0	0	4
Idaho	11	15	28	44
Illinois	13	36	72	102
Indiana	7	26	65	92
Iowa	0	30	73	100
Kansas	4	39	76	105
Kentucky	36	74	98	120
Louisiana	16	44	55	64
Maine	0	0	13	16
Maryland	1	10	17	24
Massachusetts	0	0	5	14
Michigan	2	8	63	83
Minnesota	6	20	67	87
Mississippi	18	67	77	82
Missouri	19	56	98	115
Montana	20	35	51	57
Nebraska	16	48	75	93
Nevada	7	8	11	17
New Hampshire	0	0	7	10
New Jersey	0	0	10	21
New Mexico	6	9	16	32
New York	0	2	31	62
North Carolina	12	37	89	100
North Dakota	7	18	33	53
Ohio	3	11	69	88
Oklahoma	14	26	51	77
Oregon	1	7	27	36
Pennsylvania	2	9	50	67
Rhode Island	0	1	3	5
South Carolina	0	20	44	46
South Dakota	7	31	50	67
Tennessee	19	50	79	95
Texas	52	122	180	254
Utah	10	11	15	29
Vermont	1	2	13	14
Virginia	27	65	96	134
Washington	1	1	21	39
West Virginia	11	24	49	55
Wisconsin	1	8	49	72
Wyoming	1	2	12	23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>1,252</b>	<b>2,374</b>	<b>3,146</b>

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that courses operating in the red are often facilities built out of the line of municipal expansion. So start building courses, says Claussen, in the areas showing the greatest growth potential.

In many areas of this region, it is difficult to find land suitable for golf. Much available land is rough, hilly and full of shale. In St. Louis County, says Claussen, resistance has been encountered from the segment of the public regarding the use of wilderness land. Land use laws, which restrict the choice of building sites, particularly in Colorado, have been a development problem.

George Kerr, NGF consultant, reporting on the Southwest Region, states that the number of public recreational facilities in this region, as in the deep south, is affected strongly by

“prevailing traditional social attitudes” toward minority groups. Therefore, many of these areas have a large proportion of private courses providing the golf facilities. But the constant chipping away of old-line ethnic inflexibility will eventually liberate the present inhibited development of public golf facilities in this region.

Although golf-housing developments are popular in many areas, in every case, these courses serve only a fraction of the current need.

Sheridan Much, reporting on the Pacific Northwest Region, says most courses in this area report heavy play during the golf season. Some metropolitan area populations demanding more public golf have been handicapped in municipal course development because much of the population lives outside the city limits in unincor-

porated areas and, so, does not contribute tax money to city projects.

In analyzing the needs of the Pacific Southwest Region, NGF consultant Buddie Johnson reports that several cities in this area are experiencing unparalleled growth and are all planning a batch of new courses, but it is evident that even these efforts will not fulfill the predicted need.

This region has many scenic areas that invite tourism, which also is swelling available courses to the bursting point.

The incredible growth in many counties in this region, says Johnson, has led to skyrocketing land prices, which often preclude private golf course development altogether and further increase the burden of municipalities to provide much-needed public courses. □

# Highlights of the NGF Public Course Survey

The following conclusions were drawn from the recent National Golf Foundation statistical analysis showing the ratio of public golf courses to population (by county) in the United States, October 1, 1972.

Of the 3,146 counties in the United States:

- 15.63 per cent, or 492 counties, with a total population of 5,444,317 (1970 census) have no golf courses, public or private;
- 39.79 per cent, or 1,252 counties, have no public golf courses;
- 75.46 per cent, or 2,374 counties, have no municipal golf courses.

Using the National Golf Foundation's “desirable ratio” of golf courses to population (one 18-hole regulation golf course per 25,000 population):

- Seven states exceed the “desirable ratio” of public golf courses to population. New Hampshire is 15.5 per cent over; Maine, 8.3 per cent; Vermont, 8.2 per cent; North Dakota, 5.3 per cent; Wyoming, 4.7 per cent; Nevada, 3.4 per cent and South Dakota is .34 per cent over.

- The 1,524,541 population of the Borough of Manhattan in New York city is the largest of any county in the United States having no public golf courses at all. Next is the Anchorage Census Division in Alaska with a population of 126,333.

- The county with the largest population (110,963) but with no golf courses—public or private—is Portsmouth Independent City in Virginia. Next is Bowie County, Tex. (population 67,813).

- Yellowstone National Park County in Montana (population 64) has the smallest population of any county in the United States and is the county with the least number of people, which has no golf courses, public or private.

- Of all the states, Texas has the most counties (180) with no municipal golf courses.

- Hawaii is the only state with at least one municipal golf course in every county.

Current statistics show that the state needing the most public golf courses to bring its golf course-population ratio into balance is New York, which could

use an additional 430 eighteen-hole public courses (now has the equivalent of 297 public 18-hole courses).

Next in need is California, which, paradoxically, is also the state that currently boasts the greatest number of public golf courses in operation (the equivalent of 398 eighteen-hole courses). California needs an additional 400 18-hole public golf course layouts.

As might be expected, Alaska has the fewest public courses per square mile and also has the least number of holes of public golf of any state—one nine-hole public course for all its 586,400 square miles of area.

The District of Columbia has the highest concentration of public golf courses—18 holes per 13.8 square miles—but the population of the District calls for another 25 eighteen-hole public golf courses.

Hawaii is second in public course density, with 18 holes of public golf per 26.2 square miles, and its current population indicates that the state could use the equivalent of 6.3 more 18-hole public facilities.