



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie CGCS

Fortunate for my 15-year-old ego, I was swimming at the time. Unfortunate

for my heart, I was swimming at the time.

Hot July summer nights and a, “be home close to dark” curfew, allowed me opportunities to be a young adult. Money in my pocket from my gig as a caddy, provided resources for chaperoned dates with my girlfriend, including viewing the 1975 blockbuster *Jaws*, at the time a very dramatic and even shocking cinema spectacular.

I remember well the evening following the show heading to White Bear Lake with a couple of buddies for a not unusual quick cool swim off the end of the Yacht Club dock. With a fast head start, I sprinted with high toes to limit the chance of a splinter toward the wooden precipice. In the twilight, arching high and far over the calm as glass water, the embrace of the luke-warm lake broke my flight. Turning around to shout my excitement, I was quickly terrified.

Coming rapidly to crunch my bones was a white anomaly...in my youthful mind *Jaws* was very much alive. Rarely have I been so scared as I was that night; my diving bubbles following me closely in the limited evening light appearing to be a twenty-foot white shark with a grin of sharp teeth. As I said, fortunate for my ego I was swimming at the time!

On the horizon there is a new threat, a real scary threat, a known threat as each of you are agronomists and scientists alike.

Water usage evaluations and the potential for permit restrictions may well be in the future. It has nothing to do with the drought, although the weather is exacerbating the issue. Rather we, as a state, are wasting our most precious and finite resource.

No, not golf courses, for responsible stewards manage them. And while it would be easy to point fingers, that is no way to craft self regulation to protect an industry so dependent on a resource so much out of our control. Now is the time to unite all golf destinations, allied associations and golfers alike to develop reasonable and responsible industry water management practices and even more important to the success of protecting our water assets, individual crisis management plans.

For the past several years the MGCSA has dabbled in an Association wide Environmental Stewardship Plan focused upon water...this in the land of 10,000 lakes really was quite peripheral in nature. That is until last year when over a dozen courses had their permits pulled and were directed to stop irrigating their turf. The drought continues and the talk of greater regulation is becoming a concern.

Heard at an Environmental Initiative meeting last fall were keynote speakers for the DNR. They said that surface water isn't the only target for acute regulation. Those who water mine deep into the aquifers are also to be examined...especially the recreational users... golf courses.

Practically a call to arms, the Board of Directors immediately created a task force to craft a reasonable plan of self-regulation based upon the success of other

state golf course associations. A plan that is four fold in its current rough draft: a two page 'white paper' describing typical and responsible irrigation upon golf courses, a more in-depth reference manual to be used as a resource for all environmental initiatives moving forward, BMPs to be shared with all golf courses encouraging the most practical management tools currently available and last but of most importance, a site assessment template to include immediate reductions in permitting where applicable and a staged crisis management plan to be implemented should individual clubs be required to by the DNR.

The end game as you have read is to generate a plan of self-regulation through staged reductions to prevent the total elimination of any golf club's water source.

It was interesting to learn early in the general review process that many golf courses are permitted for significantly more gallons of water than they actually use...even in a year of drought. This begs the question, are water allocation projections estimated by the DNR based upon permitted totals or actual usage? If the former, than each club must take a hard look at their actual need for total gallon use in a monthly and annual basis.

What if in the initial self-regulation negotiations (actually a rather inaccurate word for we are at the mercy of the DNR regulators) the golf industry, in general and across the state, arrived at the table with an immediate cut of 5 percent from the total amount permitted for golf course irrigation? As the first industry to *ever* pursue a reduction, much less self-regulation, we would be setting a precedent well worth consideration.

Imagine the surprise of the water-

regulating agency when the golf industry presents a staged plan of water reduction, when called upon, with the goal of never loosing the ability to water the fine playing surfaces. Consider this idea of an example program... and bear in mind that it is rough, unapproved and still in the formative stages... each club crafts its own crisis management plan reducing water use upon their course in areas of the Superintendent's choosing based upon staged increments of 6%, 6%, 6% and 2% every thirty days and not to exceed 20%.

What if this self mandated accountability, supported by all golf-allied associations, state agencies and local authorities indicated such progressive thinking that specific exemptions were created to protect golf destinations from unreasonable regulation. Imagine how helpful this solidarity would go when other issues such as nutrient fate and pesticide use come under the scrutiny and predation of uninformed sectors of society.

Here is the catch though...the MGCSA needs everyone, yes everyone including those who are not currently members of the Association, to participate in this endeavor. This isn't a membership rally cry, this is a true "come to Jesus" as without the majority...over 90 percent of all courses buying in the proposal... our industry could meet some hard opposition.

Am I scared of golf loosing its access to irrigation water? Yes! Too the point of embarrassing myself? Well maybe not so much, as I believe in the power of the Association as leaders in this initiative and the respect we have garnered as stewards of the environment.

I'd like to think that we are the sharks in this tank!