



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

Water fees dropped from environment budget bill

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A plan that would have increased water fees to pay for increased monitoring of the state's groundwater is off the table. The conference committee on the environment and ag budget bill scrapped the water fees, but the monitoring will be done with money from the state's general fund.

Fine turf managers, environmentalists to their core, across our region have been expecting an increase in pressure to conserve water for quite some time as the awareness and appreciation for the quality and quantity of this finite resource grows among state agencies and in the legislature. The economist within feels spared. However the greater problem still remains. *How does the golf industry respond to long term water management challenges?*

In general our state, "land of 10,000 lakes", currently has issues with the quantity of water available at any given time. Surface water, which is visible and measurable and can be recycled within the surface system, provides the majority of water to users in the state, the greatest of which is power generation that utilizes 65 % of both surface and aquifer sources. The bulk of water consumed for municipal use, agriculture, mining and yes, golf course irrigation, is from aquifers deep in the ground.

These storage systems are a mystery as they are only *estimated* in size and perhaps more importantly it isn't completely known as to *how they* are recharged.

Simply put, surface water seeps into the aquifers over time. As the population in our state grows, more impermeable surfaces are created, agricultural properties expanded with increased drainage and wetlands are filled in to accommodate the growth. Rather than 'seeping' into below ground aquifers, the surface water is redirected...eventually out of our state and either north to Hudson Bay, east to the

Atlantic Ocean, or south to the Gulf of Mexico.

The bulk of the water pulled from ‘our’ aquifers is used once and then drained away to a creek or a stream and finally into a river.

How does the golf industry fit into the equation? Golf is always positioned low on the water allocation totem pole.

Perceived as a game for the wealthy (even though over 90% of rounds are at public golf facilities), golf courses are considered recreational and non-productive (although a 2.3 billion dollar state industry) natural disaster zones (yet the benefits of open space are well documented) and also significant water wasters. This mind set is almost institutional in nature.

The only way to change these perceptions is to promote the reality of the greater good of golf courses through education and demonstrate stewardship through water conservation and realistic crisis management plans. This is especially true when water, our most critical resource, becomes seasonally scarce. Steps toward this end have already begun through the creation of the Golf Industry Environmental Stewardship Committee, a coalition of representatives from the MGCSA, MGA, MPGA, CMAA and MWGCOA.

Unfortunately these groups do not represent all of the courses in the state, all those employed in the golf industry or all players of the game. Our allied partners can/will be responsible for their sectors in the industry, however, we, the MGCSA, must be dedicated to enlisting 100% support of conservation initiatives by 100% of the members in the MGCSA.

Our efforts, which will be tested in the next legislative session, will be for naught if we can only claim or demonstrate a 65% participation or support rate. Who in their right mind would think 65% is “good enough”? Especially when dealing with a commodity such as water or the environment.

Your Board of Directors and the active Committees are just as busy as you are and yet have made time to support the golf industry. Think about what you can do to prepare for political action, recruit a new member or develop a water crisis management plan. The fate of golf course management, as you know it, truly is in your hands.

Proper planning will make a positive for the golf industry. The MGCSA, appreciates your support in the upcoming initiatives for the good of the game.

Figures in this column came from the 2006 MGA Golf EIS and DNR publications.