

INTRODUCING THE MICHIGAN TURFGRASS ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

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Introduction

The Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program (ESP) is intended to organize efforts of the turfgrass industry, regulatory agencies, MSU, and citizen groups to advance the environmental stewardship of the turfgrass industry and to recognize environmental achievements. The concept for the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship program began with an understanding of the effectiveness of the Farm-A-Syst program and other environmental awareness programs available to the golf turf industry on a national basis, namely the Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Program. With these programs in mind, a group of MSU, MDA, MTF, and golf industry representatives met to conceptualize a program that would be productive for Michigan's golf turf industry. From those early meetings, an agreement was forged between the state agencies of MDEQ, MDA, and MDNR, the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation, and the Michigan Golf Course Owners Association to cooperate in a proactive program to advance the environmental stewardship of the golf industry.

The objectives of this program are to:

- to advance the environmental stewardship of Michigan's golf industry;
- to clearly identify environmental laws and regulations and advance the compliance of the golf turf industry;
- to engage the golf industry, regulatory agencies, MSU, and environmental citizen groups in productive communication; and
- to recognize, promote, and award environmental stewardship achievements.

The program will be delivered through a series of education, self-assessment, and partnership activities. There will be two distinct program areas - pollution prevention and environmental enhancement. The pollution prevention area will be initially directed toward evaluation and protection of point sources of pollution. Materials have been recently developed to provide managers with a self-assessment tool to gauge the level of protection and regulatory compliance in key areas. This section is expected to be launched in 1998. The environmental enhancement area will focus on enhancing wildlife habitat, surface water areas (streams, ponds, wetlands), and native vegetation on golf courses in Michigan. This section is expected to be developed in 1998 in cooperation with several organizations that are leaders in Michigan in those areas.

Pollution Prevention System

The pollution prevention section will engage the "Turf-A-Syst" materials that were developed during the previous year in cooperation with turf industry and state agencies. There are seven modules that have been developed and piloted by a variety of golf course operators and owners. They are:

1. Site Evaluation
2. Pesticide Handling and Application
3. Pesticide Mixing and Loading Pad
4. Pesticide and Fertilizer Storage
5. Wellhead Protection & Closing
6. Fuel Storage
7. Regulations Checklist

This delivery of this program is based on the "Farm-A-Syst" model and will rely on involvement from the Michigan Departments of Agriculture, Environmental Quality, Natural Resources, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and Michigan State University. The delivery of the program will vary from the

Farm-A-Syst model in several aspects and will be performed on a state-wide basis.

The Turf-A-Syst materials will be delivered using a three-part process. The first part will be an educational event where all participants will enter the system and they will be lead through all seven modules of the package. Each module is designed as a self-assessment tool and will allow the manager to understand the potential for pollution to occur on their property and learn practical tips to reduce the risk of pollution problem. In addition, they will gain an understanding of the laws and regs associated with each of the focus areas and apply them to their individual situation. State agency personnel will be enlisted to direct the interpretation of the laws and regs. The second phase of the system is for the participant to take the assessment tool back to their operation and utilize the information to address the areas of concern. The final phase is to schedule an on-site visit by an MSU turf stewardship member who will document progress and award completion in appropriate areas. The golf course business will be credited for completion of specific modules and will advance their standing in the Stewardship Program. Goals will be established during the site visit to clearly outline future pollution prevention activities. Enhancements can be documented by additional visits to the operation. Once the operation has completed the site visit and set future goals, they will be eligible for program incentives.

Potential Future Modules - Operations

- Equipment Wash Areas - MDA, MDEQ
- Emergency Preparedness - MDA, MDEQ
- Waste Management, Shop Area - MDEQ
- Recycling - MDEQ, MDA
- Understanding the Construction Permit Process - MDEQ

Environmental Enhancement System

The "Environmental Enhancement" section will focus on advancing the "green space" value of golf course properties and will address wildlife habitat, indigenous vegetation, and water quality. There is an exciting opportunity to accomplish these goals by partnering with advocacy groups that are dedicated to these areas in Michigan. Groups like the MUCC, Michigan Audubon Society, Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, the Forest Stewardship Program, the Kalamazoo Nature Center and several land conservancy groups are examples of successful organizations that have a great deal to offer golf course properties. These and other groups will be recruited to join with MSU, MDA, MDEQ, and MDNR to enlist their current programs to appropriate golf course properties. The projects that are performed on any particular golf course will vary based on the complexity of the property and its surroundings. The challenge will be to develop a system in which each property can reliably assess the resources available on their property and in the surrounding area, set goals for advancement and document achievement. A program dedicated to wildlife enhancement and conservation on golf courses is currently being delivered by Audubon International located in upstate New York and there are several properties in Michigan that are members of this system. The efforts of the proposed Michigan program will help augment the goals of the Audubon International program by providing stronger connections with locally based organizations dedicated to wildlife conservation.

The potential modules discussed include:

- Wetland Protection
- Streambank Management
- Stormwater Management
- Plant Community Enhancements
 - Forest
 - Wetland
 - Prairie - Native Plants
- Wildlife Attraction
 - Nesting
 - Cover
 - Food
- Wildlife Management
 - Problem Species - Geese, Deer, Muskrats...

We will be cooperating with the regional golf course superintendant associations to deliver this program in 1998. Stay tuned to your organization for details of the initial meetings.