

2002 USGA NORTH-CENTRAL REGION YEAR IN REVIEW

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Stressful weather conditions and increasing operating budget constraints were a one-two punch that made life difficult for most superintendents across the Region throughout the 2002 season.

Cool days and cold nights accompanied by hard frost persisted well into late May and early June. Relatively few days of comfortable golfing weather during spring limited cash flow at both public and private courses, which set the table for budget freezes or budget cuts later in the season. Many golf facilities were already reeling from the effects of a sluggish economy over the past few years and were counting on a bumper crop of cabin-fevered golfers to alleviate their financial concerns.

With fewer dollars to spend, some golfers simply played less while others expected nothing less than the most bang for their buck and became unreasonable in their expectations for course conditioning. Consequently, the playing surfaces, greens in particular, were pushed too hard too early in the season at a number of courses. The consequences of ultra-low heights of cut, double cutting, excessive vertical mowing, low fertility, etc. were not realized until hot, humid weather arrived.

One effect of the cold spring was weed encroachment into slowly growing fairways and roughs. Clover and dandelions were common problems and knotweed became well established in weak, heavily compacted sites. Crabgrass and foxtail became the main concern once hot weather arrived. Some attempts to control weeds during the exceptionally cool weather this spring were an exercise in futility. Dandelions on bunker banks needed to be treated up to three times before an acceptable level of control was achieved at several courses visited during May.

The cold spring transitioned into a hot, humid summer practically overnight. Once extended periods of temperatures in the 90's arrived most concerns shifted to keeping *Poa annua* alive for the rest of the season. In general the long periods of hot weather were accompanied by relatively little rainfall in Michigan and Wisconsin, while courses in some areas of Minnesota experienced well over 30 inches of rain between June and August. It was, by far, more difficult keeping the turf alive during hot/wet weather compared to hot/dry weather.

Providing golfers consistent playing conditions during sweltering weather was even more of a challenge when budgets were frozen or cut during midsummer. Budget concerns often required reductions in labor and supplies. Often, the interval between fairway fungicide applications was lengthened or the applications were eliminated to accommodate a shrinking budget. The inability to make timely applications of fungicides to prevent Pythium blight at courses with modest budgets resulted in moderate to extensive losses of turf in fairways and roughs. Stress related diseases, such as basal rot anthracnose, was noticed on greens at many more courses last summer, sometimes causing extensive losses of turf on greens dominated by *Poa annua*.

Japanese beetles continue their march west across the Region. These pest are become well established in Wisconsin and have been found at several courses in the Twin Cities area.

Whether or not other insect pests such as annual bluegrass weevils (ABW) have the ability to migrate and survive in Michigan remains to be seen. ABW has been slowly moving west, and damaging populations of this pest have been found in western Pennsylvania, only a state away from southern Michigan.

Many facilities hoped to recoup some of the spring loss of revenue by extending the golfing season well into October and November. Unfortunately, the weather made another 180 degree shift during fall into long periods of temperatures 15 to 20 degrees below average. The unseasonable fall weather dashed hopes of recovery and was a disappointing, but fitting, end to a difficult season.