

Using Salt-Tolerant Grass To Manage Tidal Flooding

Ocean City Golf Club, Newport Bay Golf Course
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Issue

Tidal flooding is a regular issue at many coastal golf courses and the Newport Bay Golf Course at Ocean City Golf Club is no exception. Normal tides do not flood the course, but storm tides and surges frequently flooded fairway and rough areas on the 13th hole. In spite of Superintendent Mike Salvio's best efforts to establish different cool- and warm-season turfgrasses in the flood-prone areas, salt in the brackish water from the Newport Bay continually killed the grass.

The salt-affected area was consistently bare. It created playability and traffic issues, erosion concerns and detracted from an otherwise nice view. In order to establish any turfgrass in this area, a salt-tolerant grass was needed.



Despite periodic coastal flooding, alkaligrass provides good ground cover and playing conditions.

Action

Salvio noticed that grasses along the edge of the marsh were thriving in a salt-ridden habitat. He thought that perhaps these grasses could help establish ground cover in the flood-prone areas of the golf course. The maintenance staff tried transplanting grass from the edge of the marsh to the problematic areas on the 13th hole, but sod from the marsh did not hold together well and was difficult to transport and lay evenly.

To provide better ground cover, alkaligrass was interseeded into the sod. Alkaligrass, or salt grass, is a turfgrass that grows well in wet and saline conditions. Planting alkaligrass would not only supplement the marsh grass, it would also incorporate a turfgrass with better playing characteristics into the problematic area.

Results

Once the alkaligrass was fully established, the visual appearance and playing conditions of the hole were dramatically improved. Furthermore, turf loss no longer occurs following storm tides and surges. Alkaligrass also enhances the view from the tee when the grass produces seedheads. The alkaligrass area is mowed two or three times per year at a height of 4 inches, which makes it penal but playable.

Alkaligrass has been an overwhelming success at Ocean City Golf Club. It provides an inexpensive and effective solution to the turf problems caused by tidal flooding and golfers could not be happier with the new look and improved playing conditions.