

Solving Animal Issues Through Habitat Management

Century Country Club
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Voles were causing significant damage to bunker faces during winter. Maintaining their habitat in naturalized areas greatly improved the situation.

Issue

Century Country Club had an ongoing issue with voles. During the winter, the rodents would burrow into the steep bunker banks and cause considerable damage. They created tunnels that weakened the integrity of the bunker faces and caused erosion. They also chewed grass plants down to the crown and created trails. Their tunneling caused bunker faces to slough and collapse, and their trails were unsightly and created playability issues. The steep bunker slopes made repairs difficult and labor intensive. Each spring, repairing vole damage required several staff members and a month of work. The process often involved a total of 400 labor hours, sometimes even more. After studying the issue, Superintendent Kevin Seibel, CGCS, came to a surprising conclusion, the voles were migrating into the bunker faces each winter because their habitat elsewhere was being disrupted by mowing.

Action

Century Country Club has naturalized rough throughout the golf course. These areas add to course aesthetics and provide an excellent habitat for a variety of wildlife, including voles. Each fall, naturalized areas were mowed down to an approximate height of 3-4 inches in an effort to maintain good playability. Unfortunately, mowing these areas low eliminated winter habitat for the voles, causing them to migrate into the bunker banks.

To solve this problem, fall mowing heights were raised in the naturalized roughs to preserve vole habitat and discourage them from entering the bunker faces. Instead of mowing at 3-4 inches, naturalized areas were mowed at 8 inches during the late-fall mowing. Longer vegetation was still being trimmed and playability maintained, but now there was also adequate habitat for the voles.

Results

Adjusting mowing heights in naturalized areas has been very successful in addressing the vole issue. The damage to bunker faces has decreased dramatically, typically requiring no more than 20 labor hours to repair. This is a significant improvement from past seasons when damage to bunker faces often required 400 labor hours to repair. Raising mowing heights in the naturalized areas involved no additional expense and greatly reduced the amount of labor and cost required to repair the bunker banks each spring. Understanding that the problem with voles in the bunker banks was actually related to mowing heights in the naturalized areas helped the staff at Century Country Club find a simple solution to a very costly problem.