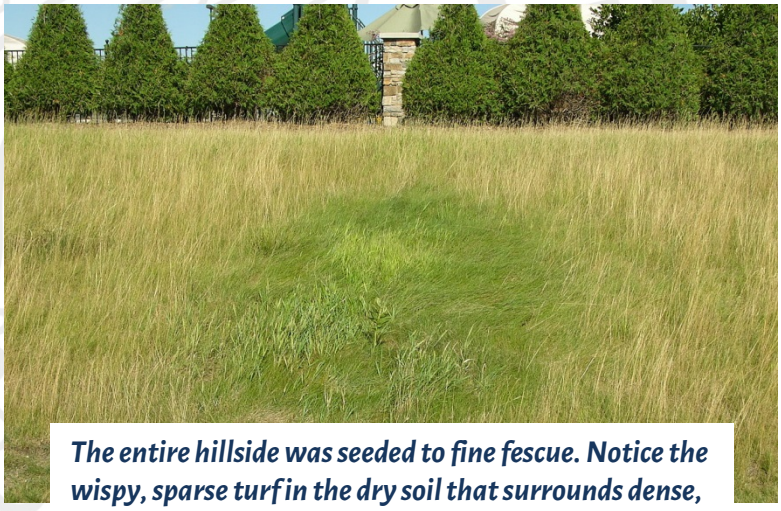
You Can't Be Wispy when you're All Wet

By Bob Vavrek, agronomist, Central Region

April 13, 2015

Many areas of the Central Region have been inundated with heavy rainfall during the past few weeks. The acute effects of severe flooding with respect to fatalities and property damage are usually well documented in the nightly news. The immediate impact of flooding that occurs on a golf course is obvious because erosion and silt deposits are seen just as soon as the water recedes. However, some of the side-effects of heavy rainfall that caused the floods are not so obvious.

A popular practice at an increasing number of golf facilities is to convert a portion of the maintained rough to tall grass areas. These low input naturalized areas still require annual maintenance, but the ultimate cost of managing a tall grass area will be less than the cost of maintaining a rough that is mowed at least once a week, fertilized, and treated for weeds and insect pests.



The entire hillside was seeded to fine fescue. Notice the wispy, sparse turf in the dry soil that surrounds dense, weedy grasses in a wet spot caused by a single drain tile that exits an adjacent housing development.

Your average golfer prefers a thin, wispy stand of turf in a natural area as well as an opportunity to find an errant shot and, depending on the lie, the opportunity to advance the ball towards the hole. Golfers have been grousing a bit more than

TGIF Record Number 260938

usual about dense, unplayable tall grass lately on Course Consulting Service visits, and the weather is mostly to blame for their angst.

The fact is that once the turf is well established, most tall grass areas perform best when they are kept as dry as possible. Fine fescue natural areas are particularly susceptible to the encroachment of coarse, weedy grasses and broadleaf weeds under wet soil conditions. Unfortunately, nothing can be done to keep the recent heavy rainfall out of the tall grass.

On the other hand, an extra effort can be made to keep irrigation off the tall grass areas. Full-circle sprinklers that extend coverage into the natural areas can be switched to part-circle sprinklers, and you may find sprinklers deep in the roughs that can be eliminated. This often occurs in highly visible areas of the course where sprinklers that water tees are located between the tees and nearby tall grass areas. Tees are typically watered frequently throughout the season to accelerate divot recovery, so the tall grass areas near tees are often lush and weedy. Take the time to assess and adjust irrigation coverage during spring and you will reap the double benefit of water savings and the tall grass areas golfers crave.

Source: Bob Vavrek (rvavrek@usga.org)

Central Region Agronomists:

Bob Vavrek, agronomist – bvavrek@usga.org

John Daniels, agronomist – jdaniels@usga.org

Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service

Contact the Green Section Staff

TGIF Record Number 260938