

What's Trending Out West

By Larry Gilhuly, agronomist, West Region

September 2, 2015

Trend – a general direction in which something is developing or changing.

Many of the trends on golf courses in the western U.S. are related to water. Water, or rather the lack of water, continues to dominate conversations from California to British Columbia where mandatory cutbacks are being introduced. While California golf courses continue to deal with the challenge of a 25 percent reduction in water use, every golf course in the greater Vancouver area now are under Stage-3 [Vancouver Water Restrictions](#) since July 20. Typically, British Columbia receives 50-100 inches of rainfall annually, creating excellent conditions for *Poa annua*. However, several weeks of severe to extreme drought and Vancouver Water Restrictions have taken a heavy toll on this highly water dependent plant, Golf course superintendents are preparing for extensive reseeding when natural rainfall returns or water restrictions are lessened.

While the severity of drought is being felt in Vancouver, greater acceptance of brown areas is a definite trend being observed during Course Consulting Visits throughout the West Region. Golfer awareness of water shortages in other portions of the region has raised their observation skills. Also, another trend is the use of various types of wetting agents on fairways. The use of wetting agents on fairways has allowed golf courses to reduce overall water use – some reporting as much as 25-30 percent reduction in water use this summer. The cost for wetting agents can sometimes be high, but the results have been encouraging when dealing with mandatory water use reductions.

Moving forward, another major trend this year has been the addition and use of forward tees. Many courses have added forward tees over the past decade, often shortening distances into the lower 5,000-yard range. However, as the golfing population ages, now we are seeing courses add tees that play closer to 4,500

yards. Both men and women are enjoying par and birdie putts gained by playing forward tees. The article [Move Forward, Not Back](#) offers a complete review of the reasons for forward tees.

As a final trend, three innovative ideas to bring an entire generation into the game are getting rave reviews from golfers and golf operations. While the ideas may not be possible at every facility, economic sustainability is at the core of every golf course operation. Each of the three ideas are helping attract the “Millennial” generation while providing positive cash flow for golf facilities and introducing a fun new way to enjoy a golf course. Without going into great detail, check out these three sites to learn more about the combination of surfing ([Trysting Tree](#)), soccer ([Meadow Park](#)) and just plain fun ([City of Loveland, Colo. – Games on the Range](#)). After all, isn’t having fun a fundamental part of the game?

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