

The Trifecta For Tree Troubles

By Larry Gilhuly, agronomist, West Region

October 9, 2015

There is no question that trees cast a long shadow on turf growth and are one of, if not the most controversial topics discussed during Course Consulting Service visits. We all have heard various comments and opinions – often leaning on the side of emotion – about removing trees. However, during a recent visit to Sahalee Country Club, Tom Huesgan, CGCS introduced a well-conceived plan of presenting three different sources of information to his membership to help them “see the light.”

Sahalee Country Club is not your average tree-lined golf course. The 27-hole golf course was built in an established forest in western

Washington during the late 60s. The forest was second-growth firs, cedars and hemlocks which, in the maritime climate of western Washington, grow fast causing shade to quickly become a major issue – especially when over 9,000 trees are on the property.

Since the time of construction – especially during the past two decades – selective tree removal has occurred near the greens, tees and some fairway landing zones. Good results have been achieved by using science to help identify the many layers of trees that needed to be removed. However, the tree problems at Sahalee go far beyond the green sites. For this reason, a certified arborist was brought in to do a complete analysis of every tree. The arborist recommended



A strategic plan will be used at Sahalee Country Club to help course officials make informed decisions about tree removal.

removing approximately 20 percent of the trees in order to strengthen the remaining trees, remove unsafe trees and improve the longevity of the forest environment.

The second step in the program employed the expertise of the golf course architect. The architect evaluated each hole to determine which trees had overgrown the playing characteristics of the course and would be good candidates for removal. In most cases, removing trees involves widening playing corridors that have progressively been narrowed since the time of original construction.

The final step involved a specialty tree evaluation Course Consulting Service visit from the USGA Green Section. Using the expertise of a USGA agronomist and various apps that predict sun position during different times of the year, growing environments were analyzed to pinpoint which trees or limbs to remove to improve sunlight exposure on playing surfaces.

The plan now is to take information from all three sources and present it to course officials in a manner that includes science, safety, agronomics and the professional opinion of their golf course architect. Hopefully the approach will have a positive result and the word “timber” will be heard throughout the forest that is Sahalee Country Club for the benefit of the players and the turfgrass.

Source: Larry Gilhuly (lgilhuly@usga.org)

West Region Agronomists:

Patrick J. Gross, regional director – pgross@usga.org

Larry W. Gilhuly, agronomist – lgilhuly@usga.org

Brian S. Whitlark, agronomist – bwhitlark@usga.org

Blake Meentemeyer, agronomist – bmeentemeyer@usga.org

[Information on the USGA’s Course Consulting Service](#)

[Contact the Green Section Staff](#)