

Update On The Coachella Valley Golf Summit

By Pat Gross, regional director, West Region

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The desert resort area of the Coachella Valley is home to 124 golf courses, which is the highest concentration of golf courses in the state of California. This week's CareerBuilder Challenge Tournament on the PGA Tour provided the perfect opportunity for leaders in the golf business to host a Golf Summit at PGA West. During the Golf Summit, participants discussed the many challenges and opportunities associated with water, the economy and highlighted the many contributions made by the game of golf to the local community.

Paramount to the vitality of the desert community is the responsible use and conservation of water. John Powell, board president of the Coachella Valley Water District (CVWD), highlighted the fact that the Coachella Valley sits atop an enormous underground aquifer that has been monitored and managed for over 100 years. Although the drought has contributed to a decline of the aquifer in recent years, conservation efforts actually contributed to a net rise in the aquifer level in 2015. A key activity of the CVWD is helping convert golf courses that are currently using ground water to non-potable sources of irrigation water like recycled water and canal water from the Colorado River. Currently, 53 golf facilities in the Coachella Valley use a non-potable water source for irrigation. Plans are in place to convert an additional 42 golf courses from potable to non-potable alternative water sources.

Recognizing that golf courses are large consumers of water, the summit highlighted the fact that golf courses also have been a key partner in the conservation of water resources. Stu Rowland, vice chairman of the CVWD Golf Water Task Force and superintendent at Rancho La Quinta Country Club in La Quinta, California, mentioned the efforts of 18 golf courses that eliminated a combined 100 acres of irrigated turf, leading to significant water savings. Unlike other turf-rebate programs in southern California, the rebates available in the

Coachella Valley only amounted to \$105,000 per course and did not cover all expenses. However, golf courses still were willing to do the work and shared in the cost of eliminating turf because it was the right thing to do for water conservation in the region. Rowland also mentioned that golf facilities continue to proactively work with the water district, voluntarily sharing water-use data with other facilities and implementing additional water-conservation measures to meet the goals set by the governor of California in April 2015.

The Golf Summit also highlighted the efforts of the USGA Green Section which has been addressing the issue of water conservation since 1921, focusing efforts on developing grasses that use less water and researching maintenance practices that reduce water use. Since 1983, over \$40 million has been spent by the USGA to support research at land-grant universities, much of which has supported the development of grasses and maintenance practices that consume fewer resources, including grasses with lower overall water requirements. Nearly all golf courses in the Coachella Valley already manage improved varieties of bermudagrass that use less water on their greens, tees, fairways and rough. Also mentioned during the Golf Summit was the [USGA Water Resource Center](#), an online resource that includes best management practices for water use efficiency and conservation from across the country.

Craig Kessler, director of governmental affairs at the Southern California Golf Association, concluded the session by mentioning that despite the El Niño year and above-average rainfall, the golf industry in California – especially in the Coachella Valley – will never go back to the way it managed water in the past. Ongoing water conservation measures are a way of life in the desert and throughout California.

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