

Developing Golf Courses In Harmony With Nature

Editor's Note: Not all developers deserve a bad rap when it comes to environmental impact. Bonita Bay is among those companies who take their stewardship of the land and its resources very seriously.

The Bonita Bay Group, a Southwest Florida developer known as a national leader for

and enhance the environment in which we all live and work could be a page out of The Bonita Bay Group's business plan," said Dennis Gilkey, president/CEO of The Bonita Bay Group. "Since the planning of our flagship community, Bonita Bay, in the early 80s, it has been our steadfast mission to achieve the highest standards in terms of land plan-



The Brooks' restoration project returned a watershed flow-way to its natural state and rejoined 91 acres of wetlands, creating a nesting and roosting area for native birds.



Bonita Bay's Club at Mediterra won the National Private Club Environmental Leader's in Golf Award for 2002.



The Tom Fazio-designed Sabal golf course is located at Bonita Bay East on a site that includes 895 acres of cypress wetlands, 190 acres of pine flatlands, lakes and hundreds of Florida's state tree, the sabal palm.

environmentally responsible development, holds the distinction of having created more Audubon International Signature Sanctuary golf courses than any other company in the world.

"Audubon International's work to protect

ning and environmental preservation."

"The Bonita Bay Group has set a new standard," said Ron Dodson, president/CEO of Audubon International. "Their commitment to environmental excellence in the planning, construction

and management of golf courses is certainly unique and provides significant benefits in terms of wildlife conservation, habitat enhancement, water conservation and water quality monitoring."

The company's long-term relationship with Audubon International has resulted in an impressive list of certifications:

The Club at Mediterra, with two Tom Fazio-designed courses, is the world's first private, 36-hole Audubon Silver Signature Sanctuary. The club's superintendent earned the highest award in the private club category of the 2002 Environmental Leaders in Golf Award, presented by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and *Golf Digest* magazine to the superintendent of a property that represents the highest level of commitment to environmental stewardship. Golf course superintendent Scott Whorral accepted the award at the GCSAA Conference and Show in Atlanta in February.

The Estates at TwinEagles, with a Jack Nicklaus- and Jack Nicklaus II- co-designed course, became the 11th certified Signature Sanctuary in the state of Florida; the Nicklaus team has been chosen to design the community's second course, which will also be developed as a Signature Sanctuary.

Bonita Bay, the company's flagship community with three Cooperative Sanctuaries designed by Arthur Hills on the site, was an early Audubon International participant; Bonita Bay received the development industry's highest international honor when it was named the Outstanding Large-Scale Community of the Year by the Urban Land Institute.

Bonita Bay's two off-site courses designed by Tom Fazio became the world's first private 36-hole Audubon Signature Sanctuary. The club's director of golf course operations earned the GCSAA's 1999 National Environmental Steward Award in the private-facility category.

The Brooks, a master-planned community, has been certified as a Cooperative Sanctuary through Audubon International's Business and Corporate Properties program.

"The Bonita Bay Group's commitment to the environment is evident from the moment they move earth, and from the moment they choose not to move earth," said Michael Stachura, *Golf Digest's* associate editor who presented Bonita Bay with the 1999 Environmental Leader in Golf Award. "They walk the line between development and a commitment to environmental stewardship better than any enterprise or business I know about."

According to Fazio, designer of golf courses at Bonita Bay Club East and Mediterra, "The Bonita Bay Group, from day one, set out to establish new standards for environmental responsibility. The design process at Bonita Bay Group courses evolves from an extensive review of the natural systems present on site. Once we understand the existing conditions, we set out to restore, enhance and protect wetlands, vegetation and habitat. Mediterra and Bonita Bay Club East represent the best in responsible development, utilizing a scientific approach to create a much improved environment."

“The Bonita Bay Group is an example, for those on either side of the development debate, of how the middle ground really can be achieved,” Stachura added. “In an area where golf does not always get a glowing report card, The Bonita Bay Group shows not only the golf community, but also the global community, how to take care of the earth.”

The Bonita Bay Group’s approach to development and its participation in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programs yields benefits beyond the obvious, according to Gilkey.

“Developing in harmony with nature often includes restoring ecosystems to their historic integrity,” Gilkey said. “Every property and golf course within our family of master-planned communities has been through aggressive programs, such as removal of exotic vegetation and replacement with native materials, restoration of wetlands and recreation of wildlife habitat. While this is not the most cost-effective method of development, the returns more than compensate for that front-end investment, both in the sustainability of the land and the appeal this environmental work has to prospective buyers. So it’s a sound way of doing business and a win-win situation.

“We believe sustainability and respect for nature is everyone’s responsibility,” Gilkey continued. “Participation in Audubon International programs that reach from major development projects to backyard efforts is one of the best ways we know to help businesses and individuals assure that what we enjoy today will be enjoyed by future generations.”

The Bonita Bay Group is a diversified company involved in the planning, development, sales and management of master-planned communities throughout Southwest Florida. The company employs more than 1,300 individuals and is developing six master-planned communities - Bonita Bay, The Brooks, Shadow Wood Preserve, Mediterra, The Estates at TwinEagles, and Verandah - along with 12 golf courses and two marinas.

The Bonita Bay Group team shares a dedication to exceptional customer service as defined in its E5 program: Ethics, Execution, Environmental Sensitivity, Excellence, Every Day.

Additional information about the company is available at www.BonitaBayGroup.com.

-Amy Gravina

Stewardship Notes

Operative Word in ACSP is ‘Cooperate’

By Shelly Foy

Thankfully, winter is almost over and the sun is shining again in Florida! We certainly did not have our usual bragging weather this year. That

Jeep Wrangler that I bought (and swore would never have the top on unless it was pouring rain) sadly has not been topless nearly enough because of the cold.

When you are riding in a Jeep with the top down, you tend to go slower so that you can take



everything in. You drive the back roads, the scenic routes, and you just think about things. At least I do, anyway. So on one of my recent gallivants around town I started thinking about the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and particularly the word *cooperative*. That one word emphasizes the

kind of relationship Audubon International wants with its members, but also stresses the value of reaching out as part of participating in the program.

The truly successful golf courses in the ACSP are those that do involve everyone, and, when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. If I am a golfer and I have a question, I am going to ask the golf pro. If I am working on the ACSP and need money, I am going to involve my general manager, green committee, beautification committee, etc.... because if they are supportive, they are going to make sure that I have the money I need. If I want to make a few changes on the golf course (like naturalizing areas), I am going to make sure that the golfers

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are aware of the benefits beforehand so that they will embrace these projects. When I have questions, I want to surround myself with experts (Audubon staff and resource advisory group members) so that I can become more knowledgeable. If I want to show my neighbors that golf courses are beneficial to the community and the environment, I am going to invite some of them to be on my resource advisory group, or at the very least I am going to make sure I communicate our efforts to them.

Curious as to what others thought about the topic of cooperative efforts, I sent a few e-mails and wanted to share some responses.

Dr. H. Bernton, chairman, Audubon Committee and member, Windstar Country Club:

The Green Committee is keenly aware of our interest in mitigation efforts to enhance habitat and are supportive of suggestions for plantings that provide food and cover for birds and other small animals. I think it is important to have members of the club involved with Audubon activities, as it is an avenue for them to become stakeholders in the club, its golf course and our community.

Fred Yarrington, Audubon Committee and member, Hole-in-the-Wall Golf Club:

To achieve a fully integrated Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, it is important to have everyone in the club involved. This is the

only way for everyone to understand the purpose of the program, accomplishments, and future plans.

I have been involved in the ACSP for more than ten years, serving first as the chairman of our program, but more recently as a facilitator and supporter for the superintendent, who is the focus of our ACSP activities. I believe the golf professional and his staff also play a key role in the program, since members as a matter of convenience are most apt to seek information from them.

The pace of ACSP activities changes periodically and it has been interesting to see how support, appreciation and interest have evolved over time. We went through an active but not significant startup period, and then hit a flat spot when other golf-course priorities were deemed more important, and now have a program in place to steadily conserve water, minimize chemical applications and improve the wildlife habitat on our property. Without changing playing characteristics of the golf course, we have made a major improvement in the general appearance of our entire property by participating in the principles of the ACSP.

Alex Raimondi, CCM, general manager/COO, Wilderness Country Club:

I see the general manager's role as providing overall leadership for the ACSP and maintaining the club's long-term vision. The

GM's involvement in the program is to provide support, assist in the education of members, and retain their enthusiasm. The GM has very high visibility and direct contact with the entire membership, allowing the opportunity to provide pertinent information to members on a one-on-one basis. The board of directors and club committees rely on the GM to provide appropriate financial leadership. This allows for proper funding of current and future ACSP budgets. The entire Wilderness ACSP is a complete team effort of staff and members. This teamwork builds and maintains excitement.

Susie Stiegmann, general manager, Shadow Wood Country Club:

I have the ability to provide support for projects the superintendent feels will enhance the ACSP. From a corporate perspective I am able to gather the financial support, and from a club standpoint, I can involve our members. Involvement brings knowledge, and the more a club is involved, the greater our ability to educate not only our members, but our critics as well.

Jan Weinbrecht, senior biological scientist, University of Florida, Environmental Horticulture:

One of the most rewarding elements in my career as a turfgrass research biologist has been the opportunity to interact with turfgrass professionals. I've learned a great deal of their challenges and accomplishments, and benefited

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tremendously from their knowledge. Yet, one of the more significant moments stemmed from a chance meeting back in 1996 with Bill Iwinski - director of golf at Ironwood Municipal Golf Course in Gainesville. Bill touched on his desire to enroll Ironwood in the ACSP and that led to the formation of Ironwood's resource advisory committee, and ultimately Florida's first fully certified municipal golf course in July of 2000. As it turned out, Ironwood's Audubon Sanctuary Certification became an integral component in Alachua County's land conservation and acquisition program, as well as the City of Gainesville's Greenway Project.

Throughout the planning and implementation, we learned a great deal about watersheds and groundwater issues, wildlife habitats, plant communities and ecosystems. We came to know and befriend many individuals and groups who not only applauded the program, but also assisted in many of its accomplishments.

There were also those who challenged our goals and doubted our efforts, and to this day they persist. But, hey, that's all part of it. I've always viewed the sanctuary program as a very respectable and well regarded platform for those individuals who wanted to demonstrate their desire for environmental stewardship and sustainability. It may not be a part of every course in Florida, but every course who is a part of the Program shares the same sense of pride and sat-

isfaction that we do at Ironwood.

Bill Iwinski, PGA/golf course manager, Ironwood Golf Course, Gainesville:

When we first joined the ACSP, there were several discussions between the superintendent and myself. We were pretty good with the lip service. However, full certification seemed like something only the elite courses achieved. We did not have a budget, we did not have a committee, and we certainly did not have the time.

Then God sent an angel in the form of Jan Weinbrecht, a turfgrass biologist from the University of Florida. Jan breathed new life and enthusiasm into our Audubon program at Ironwood. He had the expertise, and quickly divided the areas of responsibilities up to manageable tasks. We also set some deadlines. With these thresholds in place, we all had to be accountable for our respective areas.

I was responsible for outreach and education, but it did my heart good to see Jan canoeing in the lakes to get samples for the water quality. Jan was an excellent example and he worked harder than anyone. If the temptation to vacillate popped in your head, there was the vision of Jan carrying a canoe or bringing out a group of graduate students. This was work; however, Jan always had a smile, a kind word, and a most positive attitude.

If you want to be certified in the ACSP, you need a Jan Weinbrecht.

Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program

New Members

Cypress Woods G&CC, Naples
 Fiddlesticks CC, Ft. Myers
 Forest CC, Ft. Myers
 Frenchman's Reserve, Palm Beach Gardens
 Gator Creek GC, Sarasota
 Hammock Dunes - Creek Course, Palm Coast
 Heritage Palms G&CC, Ft. Myers
 Hollybrook G&TC, Pembroke Pines
 IGM Eagles Club, Odessa
 IGM Highland Woods G&CC, Bonita Springs
 Kelly Plantation, GC, Destin
 La Playa GC, Naples
 LPGA International GC, Daytona Beach
 Miles Grant CC, Stuart
 Misty Creek CC, Sarasota
 Orlando Outdoor Resort, Clermont
 Pine Tree GC, Boynton Beach
 St. Johns G&CC, St. Augustine
Recertified ACS
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Dianne Rabkin, administrative assistant, Twin Eagles Golf Club:

The administrative assistant's role in environmental programs may take on many forms. The AA may be asked to collect, type, copy, distribute, telephone, coordinate, budget, survey, and train in all areas of the program. More specifically the AA coordinates with the superintendent, staff, vendors, public, and guests regarding specific tasks required to maintain certification i.e. water samples, birding surveys, case studies, educational training (school programs), document projects, clubhouse displays, and recycling to name a few. The AA may be indirectly involved in many projects or specifically assigned to organize a school tour, take charge of a case study (ours was a littoral project), put up bird houses and so on.

Kenyon Kyle, golf course superintendent, Shadow Wood Country Club:

I believe when you have everyone involved, you have a higher long-term success rate. This generates more creativity and support for programs that may not be well received initially by the members. I see my role in the ACSP as facilitator. I enjoy helping bring other people's ideas to the table and helping them to gain a better understanding of how these programs impact our club.

Audubon provides a tremendous amount of depth. Many times, programs are incorporated to serve one need or purpose. I try to identify all of the benefits, and encourage others to think globally. For example; creating/restoring habitats is obviously viewed as being good for our wildlife, but it is generally overlooked that these programs also reduce expenses by reducing labor, water, fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, etc.

Matt Taylor, golf course superintendent, Royal Poinciana Golf Club:

One simple reason to get everyone involved in the ACSP is that you can get more accomplished in a shorter amount of time. Also, once everyone is on board, you don't have to spend all your time communicating or selling the projects. I see my role as the person who drives the program and keeps it up on the list of priorities. The fact that we are a certified sanctuary is just as important in our decision making as sound agronomic practices.

Ron Hill, director of golf maintenance, Amelia Island Plantation:

In this day and time, I feel that having everyone on our staff involved in the ACSP is a win-win endeavor. All levels of staff can contribute; from the general manager to the entry-level equipment operator. They all bring another set of eyes to the scene, and if trained properly can become a very integral part of the golf operation program, as well as the ACSP.

The general manager, when playing golf, on occasion might spot leaking valves for irrigation heads or maybe a bubble in the fairway turf indicating a main line leak. The equipment operator may spot an area in a fairway or rough where birds are congregating and upon inspect-

ing, he might suggest to a supervisor either an irrigation leak or simply too much water being applied. Water Conservation?!

The utility (course set-up) person might spot a few fish "gasping" for air in a lagoon, or the water might just look different than usual. He reports his findings to the supervisor. Water Quality?!

The general manager is playing golf with the executive chef, the chairman of the golf committee and the director of golf. The chairman hooks his shot into the woods. While looking for his golf ball, he spots a pair of night hawks with their young scurrying in the palmetto. Later in the round, another member of the foursome slices a tee shot, and while looking for his golf ball, he sees an owl tending to her baby that thought it could fly and consequently learned that it was not quite ready. The general manager reports his group's findings to the golf course superintendent, who in turn puts plans into motion. Wildlife and Habitat Management?!

I need to champion the value of the ACSP for Amelia Island Plantation and the surrounding community. I see my role as an educator, trainer, promoter, salesman, volunteer and a coach to keep the team challenged and working together to accomplish our ACSP goals.

Tim Hiers, golf course manager, The Old Collier Golf Club:

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program finds its true meaning in one word, *cooperative*. As a golf course superintendent who oversees this program, it is vital that he or she involve several people with an active interest in making the program productive. This might include an ornithologist, a botanist, a wildflower specialist, a native plant expert, etc. But, if the program is to be truly successful and sustainable, then it is vital that members of the management team support and participate in the cooperative adventure.

Members of this team would include the golf professional, general manager, assistant golf professionals, food & beverage manager, and anyone that makes regular contact with the members. The members themselves should be involved because they have a vested interest in seeing their golf course improve. At the very least, there should be consistent and effective communication with key members of the club. If all the key players buy into the program, participate and support it, then significant progress can be made on an annual basis to improve the golf courses appearance and environmental vitality.

The overall objective is to improve the golf course by using all resources efficiently and safely. This would include fertilizers, plant protectants, water, fuel, electricity, equipment and your staff. One way (and there are several) to reduce resource usage would be to reduce the amount of maintained turfgrass. This will involve the golf professional and key members. If they have already bought into the overall philosophy and goals of the ACSP, this should be a productive effort.

One way to effectively initiate this

effort would be to install native plants in turf areas that seldom received errant golf shots. This allows the golfer the opportunity to acclimate to the new environment without disrupting his or her game. The golf professional can be instrumental in helping the golf course superintendent select these areas and because he has been involved in the process he can also be an effective spokesperson and salesperson in promoting the new changes. This one example illustrates the benefits of involving the right players. Significant energy and time can be wasted if key players (like the green committee chairman or club president) do not understand or support the goals and benefits of the program.

Communication and participation are the cornerstones in an effective Audubon program. As these programs continue to grow, so does the future of golf and its beneficial impact on the environment and society.

ACSP Workshop Thanks

I would like to thank everyone who attended the ACSP Workshops in December. We were pleased with the turnout and the wonderful support we received from Pelican Sound, Mizner Country Club, Championsgate and Sugarmill Woods. It takes a lot of effort from a lot of people to put together four workshops in one week. David Court and Joel Jackson deserve a big thank-you for their efforts in promoting the workshops. Joellen Zeh, staff ecologist with Audubon International did a great job in explaining how the certification process works, and did not complain a bit about the rigorous schedule we had her on.

I would also like to thank all of the speakers who helped to make the workshops successful:

George McBath, ornithologist
 Tom Coffey, president, Naples Orchid Society
 Dr. H. Berton, chairman, Audubon Committee,
 Windstar Country Club
 Russ Geiger, golf course superintendent, Hole in the Wall Golf Club
 Todd Lowe, USGA agronomist
 John Foy, director, USGA Green Section
 Garth Boline, golf course superintendent, Chi Chi Rodrigues Golf Course
 Buddy Keene, CGCS, Gainesville Golf & Country Club
 Jan Weinbrecht, senior biologist, University of Florida
 Stuart Leventhal, CGCS, Interlachen
 Bob Karnes, golf course superintendent, Walt Disney World
 Troy and Peggy Ogden, Outdoor World
 Bobby Ellis, golf course superintendent, Championsgate
 Jeff Klontz, golf course superintendent, CC of Florida
 Eric Knudsen, golf course superintendent, Mizner Country Club
 Buzz Jaskala, Florida Land Design

-Shelly Foy