

Maintaining Environmental Programs In a Tough Economy

By Shelly Foy

When budgets are being cut, staff layoffs are common, and you are trying to do more with less, how do you continue supporting your environmental programs? In reviewing some of the most successful Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programs in Florida, there is a common trait. Programs that have member/golfer participation are flourishing and are not as affected by the current economic situation.

Superintendents, are already aware of ways that golf courses benefit the environment. Through outreach and education, the goal is to share this information with others. Most people learn by doing, letting your golfers/members take a more active role in your environmental programs can benefit you in many ways.

“Great idea, but how do I do that?”

My answer always comes back to communication. In order to get people involved, you have to tell them what you are doing; then you have to ask for their participation.

PUT IT IN WRITING

Write an article for your club newsletter, explaining what the ACSP is, and end by asking that anyone interested in participating contact you. You can start by using information that is available from Audubon International’s website, <www.auduboninternational.org.

After completing Step 1 in the ACSP, the Site Assessment and Environmental Plan, you will receive a press release from Audubon International. Many superintendents use this press release in their course newsletters.

No newsletter?

Post the press release in the locker rooms or pro shop and add a note asking those interested to contact you.

Beautification committees are perfect groups of people to involve in your ACSP. Ask to attend their next meeting. Tell them about the program.

Encourage them to get involved.

If your course has a Web site, you can post information there as well.

Create a blog discussing environmental attributes of the golf course. Talk about the ACSP. Make sure golfers have the address for the site. Share with staff the responsibility for keeping content updated and fresh. Encourage golfers to participate by asking them to post comments or photos. A good example of a superintendent blog can be found at www.stonecreeksuper.blogspot.com.

START A CLUB

Form a Resource Advisory Group or an Environmental Club

Many courses successfully garnered member/golfer support by creating a Resource Advisory Group. Here is some helpful information from Audubon International on forming such a group:

“We recommend that you develop a Resource Advisory Group in the early stages of your ACSP involvement. Members who formed a strong advisory group had better success with Cooperative Sanctuary planning, project implementation, and publicity. This group is there to help you with the planning and implementation of projects, and relieve you of some of this work.

Remember when choosing people that the group should have several functions. One purpose is to provide

Good Time to Join ACSP

If you are not a current member of the ACSP for Golf Courses, now is a very good time to join. We are seeing an increase in ACSP membership across the country as superintendents look to the program to help identify and communicate positively about changes to management practices that, while triggered by budget cuts, also help to enhance habitat and conserve natural resources.

technical advice as you begin to implement specific projects. Group members may volunteer time or labor and can help monitor enhancement efforts. An even more important purpose is public, employee, and member relations. Your group can help disseminate information and help to publicize your Cooperative Sanctuary efforts.

Choose people you feel comfortable working with and who will gladly volunteer their skills. There are no meeting requirements for this group. Some meet once a month, others meet four times a year, and still others have several core members who meet informally and outside resource people who are involved as needed.

It is not always easy to get people involved. Initially you may want to print up something in your newsletter or put a flyer on your bulletin board asking if anyone’s interested. From there you may want to ask people that you know will be good candidates for the advisory group.

Tip: Don’t forget the importance of recruiting course officials for this Resource Advisory Group. General managers, golf professionals, and green committee members often have more one-on-one contact with members/golfers, and can be valuable assets in implementing programs and projects.

Another successful way to get involvement is to form an Environmental Club, or Audubon Group (call it whatever you want). This can be viewed as an added amenity a club can offer to their members/golfers. There are many examples in Florida that demonstrate the success of forming these groups (See the Grand Harbor stewardship article in the *Florida Green* Winter 2008 Issue). These groups are also excellent fundraising arms to help keep environmental projects moving forward.

EDUCATIONAL TOOLKITS:

Audubon International is creating individual toolkits that are available free to member courses. If your golf course is a member of the ACSP, simply go to the members’ on-line area (www.AudubonInternational.org/members) to



Activities like this birding tour at The Sanctuary GC on Sanibel can help maintain environmental programs. Photo by Kyle Sweet.

download the toolkits.

Nonmembers may also request a copy of these toolkits for a fee of \$10 per download, or \$20 per hardcopy.

Two toolkits are currently available: BirdBlitz, and The Green Golfer Pledge. Each kit comes with everything you need for the project. Completed tool-

kits can also be used toward certification in Outreach and Education and Wildlife and Habitat Management.

The objective of the BirdBlitz toolkit is to make a list of each bird species you see or hear on your property in a 24-hour period. This is a great tool for gathering support for your environmental programs by enlisting action from your members, golfers and staff. Each kit explains the project and tells you everything you need to know to get started. Kits include participation forms, checklists, rules, and case studies.

CONCLUSION

Encouraging participation in your programs is critical to getting golf's positive environmental message out. Working cooperatively on environmental projects will help develop closer ties with your members/golfers, can lead to increased funding for projects, and provide program sustainability in tough economic times.

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Regularly check irrigation head nozzles and operation for efficiency and conservation. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Improve Your Water-Use Efficiency

By Todd Lowe

Water use will continue to be an important golf topic as they are big targets for environmentalists. While many golf courses manage their water well, we should make every effort to improve water-use efficiency and to document improvements over time. Below are some helpful tips to consider:

1. DECREASE IRRIGATED TURF ACREAGE

An obvious way to decrease water usage on golf courses is to decrease irrigated turf acreage. Many golf courses have converted bermudagrass turf areas into naturalized landscape plantings along out-of-play rough areas. In rough areas that receive limited play, bahiagrass is a good alternative as it requires

very little water and is less penal than ornamental grasses or shrubs.

2. LEVEL IRRIGATION HEADS

Leveling irrigation heads is an ongoing practice on golf courses as they settle over time. However, did you know that you can improve irrigation efficiency by as much as 20 percent by making sure they are level?

3. NOZZLES

Nozzles can be installed to improve irrigation use and efficiency. Most nozzles generally last five to seven years and it is important to replace them as necessary to improve your distribution uniformity. Companies like Full Coverage Irrigation (www.fcinozzles.com)

specialize in optimizing distribution with improved nozzles.

4. IMPROVE IRRIGATION DESIGN

Older irrigation systems contain large heads that are spaced far apart. Such heads are often referred to as “water cannons” as they spray a large amount of water over a long distance. Newer irrigation designs often use smaller heads spaced closer together. Dry spots can occur in areas with sandy soils or nematodes, and improved irrigation designs allow staff to apply water only where necessary with minimal wastage. This is certainly not a cheap fix; but most systems are replaced every 25 years and it is important to have a qualified irrigation designer to create an efficient design for your golf course.

5. Improve controller efficiency

Older irrigation controllers block several heads together on the same station, while newer systems allow for single head control. Isolated dry spots are difficult to irrigate with such systems without wasting water, as multiple heads are run at the same time.

6. SENSORS

Portable soil probes, like the Spectrum TDR, measure soil moisture and provide turfgrass managers with objective numbers that can be used to improve irrigation scheduling. These units also have the ability to log data based on GPS and can provide moisture mapping. In-ground units are also available from other companies, but are more costly and they can only measure water in the area that they are installed. Also, it is important to be aware of their location during soil cultivation practices.

7. IRRIGATION AUDITING

Become a certified irrigation auditor. The GCSAA offers a two-day seminar each year where participants can learn the basics of irrigation distribution, uniformity, and how to audit your system. Some water management districts in Florida have helped golf courses with irrigation system auditing as well.

Advances in technology will continue with golf course irrigation systems and provide better prescription irrigation. Newer technology is being developed and innovative systems like subsurface irrigation are becoming increasingly popular with golf courses, especially around bunker faces. Also, mowers with infrared sensors may one day be able to tell turfgrass managers when the turf is becoming dry. In any case, we must continually look at ways to decrease the use of natural resources for an environmentally sustainable future of our industry. ■

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