

# 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](http://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](http://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](http://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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