

USGA Regional Update:



Ropes and stakes are unpopular with golfers but effective at preventing turf damage like this. Photo by Joel Jackson

By Todd Lowe, Senior Agronomist, Florida Region

The annual migration of northern golfers to our region has begun, and with it, an increase in the number of rounds has occurred. This increase in rounds happens at a time of the year when bermudagrass growth decreases, and these two factors combine for potential unsightly playing conditions.

Golfers are creatures of habit, often choosing the path of least resistance, and continual golfer traffic over the same area stresses turf conditions. The trodden grass blades are not readily replaced with new, green leaves, and this creates yellow-to-tan coloration in the affected areas. Eventually the soil becomes compacted and poor turf conditions occur. The following steps should be taken at this time to protect turf and improve golf course quality:

Be proactive with traffic diversion. Ropes and stakes are generally unfavorable with most members, but are very important for protecting turf. Some areas are more prone to traffic damage, like ingress/egress areas, particularly where bunkers or trees adjacent to cart paths funnel traffic into specific locations.

Implement a rotating “Resting Hole” program. This program allows one hole

per nine to recover each week from cart traffic, as it is restricted to cart paths only. In a typical program, holes #1 and #10 are deemed “earth path only” during week 1. Holes #2 and #11 are “cart path only” in week 2, and so on. Par-3 holes are automatically deemed “cart path only” and are skipped. Some fairways, like tight fairways or fairways stressed by nematodes, may require more frequent cart restriction, depending on turf recovery.

Supplemental soil cultivation practices. It is important to identify high-traffic areas and to core-aerate them prior to the season. Additional solid-tine aeration can be implemented as soil temperatures allow adequate turf recovery. Generally speaking, soil temperatures at a 4-inch depth above 65 degrees should be adequate to sustain bermudagrass recovery. Otherwise, aeration holes will be visible for longer periods.

Golf carts have become a standard feature on golf courses in our region, and dealing with traffic issues has become a necessary part of the game. Traffic control measures are also necessary to maintain good playing conditions in our region, especially during cooler months.

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