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USGA REPORT

**Fall Preparations
and El Nino Alert**

By John Foy

Throughout Florida it still feels like summer even though the calendar says fall has arrived. Especially in the central to southern part of the state, hot and humid conditions persist, and afternoon thunderstorms are still boiling up on a fairly regular basis. Sept. 10 is the time when peak Atlantic hurricane activity typically occurs, but, so far, the tropics have been quiet. While we certainly can't let our guard down, hopefully we can make it through another season without a direct hit.

Earlier in the summer the Climate Prediction Center noted the development of an El Nino effect in the equatorial Pacific, affecting Florida weather patterns thousands of miles away. In particular, upper level westerly winds disrupt and redirect tropical waves and low pressure systems coming across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa, which, in turn, reduces storms and hurricanes forming and hitting the peninsula. Based on the predictive models, further strengthening of the El Nino effect will occur and is expected to last at least through the upcoming winter months. When a strong El Nino was in place during the winter in the past, Florida and the lower Southeast experienced below-average cool temperatures and above-average rainfall.

Without pronounced environ-

mental extremes, most people have a limited appreciation of the major negative impact on general turf health and course conditioning that occurs from a prolonged period of cool and wet weather. The El Nino winter of 1997/98 stands out and is remembered because of the problems experienced at golf courses throughout the state and the tremendous number of SOS calls received in our office.

On top of cool and damp conditions, increased cloud cover further exacerbated the reduced sunlight of short winter days such that one golf course superintendent so aptly described the situation as "trying to grow grass in a closet." This situation is not conducive to bermudagrass growth and also caused problems with establishing and maintaining a dense and healthy overseeding cover on putting surfaces, tees, and fairways.

While the accuracy of long range weather forecasts still leaves a lot to be desired, given past experiences and the possibility of a moderate to strong El Nino being in place this winter, the importance of good fall preparations and having the base turf in as healthy a condition as possible is critical. A key component is a good fertilization program to maintain sufficient levels of available nutrients in the soil to support balanced and sustained growth while environmental conditions remain favorable.

Unfortunately, at many courses around Florida, the current economic recession has required budget cutbacks, but course fertilization is an area that

should not be compromised. There are no magic elixirs or substitutes for the basic macro- and micronutrients needed to support plant growth.

Especially with putting greens, sufficient leaf surface area is necessary for photosynthesis and, in turn, carbohydrate production and storage. There are no chemical treatments that can replace carbohydrates after they become depleted in the late fall, winter, and early spring. While there will always be pressure from low-handicap golfers for fast to very fast putting speeds, maintaining slightly elevated heights of cut for the next two to three months is especially important to make sure the turf is adequately prepared to survive the winter. This is true regardless of whether the putting surfaces are overseeded.

**Keene's Pointe Technician
Receives Master Certification**

Patrick Ryan, service technician at Keene's Point GC in Wintermere has received the status of Master Technician from the Equipment & Engine Training Council. The EETC is an outdoor power equipment industry association that addresses the quality of service support for your mowing equipment, chain saws, string trimmers, and just about all of the power equipment used on a golf course.

In order for Ryan to qualify for the EETC Master Technician Certification he had to pass six individual certification tests in four-cycle engines,

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Patrick Ryan

two-cycle engines, electrical drivelines and hydraulics, compact diesel

engines and generators. Each test contained 150 questions that dealt with basic product understanding, product theory of operations, and trouble-shooting. Ryan joins an elite group of technicians from around the United States and Canada.

“Passing these tests is no cake-walk,” said Jim Roche, EETC executive director. Not all technicians will be able to meet all the requirements set forth, so this is a great achievement for Ryan and other technicians who will be receiving their Master status.”

The EETC is a non-profit professional association that is addressing the critical shortage of service technicians through its school accreditation and technical certification programs. With more than 540 members, the EETC promotes and supports the recruitment, retention and education of service technicians in the outdoor power industries.

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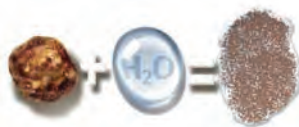


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A combined net score of 53 was enough to take home the trophy July 6 at the 12th annual John Deere Golf Pro-Am at the TPC at Deere Run in Moline, Ill.

The Pro-Am event is held in conjunction with the PGA Tour's John Deere Classic event won this year by Steve Stricker. As the official golf course equipment and irrigation supplier to the PGA TOUR, John Deere brings tournament-level quality to today's courses, giving golf course superintendents and other management professionals products, expertise and support.

The 2009 John Deere ProAm winning team included (from left): Mike Koppen, group product manager, John Deere Golf; Mark Kuhns, CGCS, president of GCSAA and director of grounds at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J.; Paul Stankowski, PGA professional; Jim Fitzroy, CGCS, vice president of GCSAA, director of Wollaston Recreational Facility and superintendent of Presidents Golf Course in North Quincy, Mass.; Larry Guyer, operations manager, John Deere Credit.

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Each gallon contains: 1.5 lbs. (N), 0.43 lbs. (K)

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- ▶ The nitrogen source contains a Urease inhibitor which prevents nitrogen loss by volatilization and bacterial degradation.
- ▶ 17-2-4 will enhance overall performance when used with applications of plant growth regulators and fungicides.

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The 16th hole at Juliette Falls Golf Club near Dunellon. Photo by Steve Keller.

Juliette Falls GC Certified 'Signature Sanctuary'

Juliette Falls Golf Club recently achieved designation as a Certified Silver Audubon International Signature Sanctuary. Signature certification is awarded only to new developments that are designed, constructed, and maintained according to Audubon International's precise planning standards and environmental disciplines. The focus of the Signature Program is to promote sound land-management practices and appropriate land-use changes based on sound scientific research.

Developed by Vikings, LLC as an amenity to a planned development in Dunnellon, the 18-hole, John Sandford-designed golf course is west of Ocala off SR 40. The name of the development came from an early settlement in the area, the town of Juliette, founded in



Steve Keller, superintendent, Juliette Falls GC

1845. The farming and phosphate mining village stood on what is now the Juliette Falls property.

Florida's fourth largest natural spring, Rainbow Springs, is located nearby and forms the spectacular Rainbow River one mile from the project. The property has 4 acres of lined, manmade lakes, 2,000 linear feet of naturalized shoreline, two restored wetlands and six created ones, 30 acres of grassland – 20 preserved and 10 created – and a total of 90 acres in managed turf. The primary natural features on the property are the oak forest and Florida scrub with many wet habitats created for stormwater control and treatment.

In the southern portion of the project, which buffers the Rainbow Springs is a 136-acre conservation area where walking and biking trails have been laid through the forest following an old railroad bed that bisects the property from north to south.

"Throughout the Signature Program process, Juliette Falls Golf Club owners and staff have demonstrated their cooperation and willingness to make decisions that positively affect wildlife habitat, water conservation, and the ecosystems that sustain life," said

Signature Programs Director, Nancy Richardson. "Their commitment to environmental excellence will continue to provide significant benefits to the natural resources on and surrounding the golf course property."

To date, only 13 other properties in Florida have achieved Silver Signature Certification.

"The golf course construction included installation of a series of groundwater monitoring wells that are sampled quarterly for water quality," said superintendent Steve Keller. "Our fertilizer and chemical use is very limited. We monitor our clipping yields from the fairways and spot apply as needed. Insect pests and weeds are not a big problem at this stage, so spot spraying and hand pulling is the norm.

"We did some testing on a microbe product called Aqua T. on a lake last February and experienced such great results that we are treating all the lakes. The owner wanted aquarium-quality water for the waterfalls and it took us awhile to get to that point. The microbes in Aqua T digest sludges and nitrates and have clarified the water. Since using it we have had no filamentous algae blooms, which is huge.

"They really did a fine job of building the maintenance complex with a 1/2-acre concrete court yard, ESD water treatment for both mix load and wash down pads. We have an air-conditioned grinding room and a propane-powered heating system. All the ceilings are insulated and have ventilation fans and duct work making it very comfortable even on the hottest or coldest days. In fact the whole development is a dual energy community which got some good press coverage.

"When the lakes were filled, we stocked some 3400 fish, including largemouth bass, bream, shiners, bluegill and catfish. We had a couple of albino catfish but they were easy prey for the Ospreys. There is lots of wildlife: turkey, deer, coyotes, fox, bobcats, eagles, kites, hawks, owls, kestrel, the whole range of small songbirds, wading birds, fox and red squirrels and gopher tortoise."

- Joel Jackson

Is the ACSP Program Taking Root?

What Members and Golfers Think About the Audubon Sanctuary Program.

By Shelly Foy

I am often asked “How do we get our members/golfers involved in our environmental stewardship efforts?”

I surveyed Audubon Committee members of several golf courses in Florida and asked three questions. I would like to thank John Axe, Bud Smart, Susan Pratt, Jack Kreager, Susan Cassell, Leo Larkin, and Ed McCoy for their thoughtful responses to the questions. Their answers have encouraged me and should encourage you as well.

What are the reasons you decided to become involved with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) at your golf course?

- Participation encourages our mem-

bers to see beyond the golf course and learn to focus and appreciate the “Gulf” course community of wildlife with which we share this beautiful location.

- We are surrounded by a federal wildlife refuge and have long practiced environmentally friendly management. Many of our members are active in local environmental groups.

- Florida is suffering from drought-related water shortages. When people have watering restrictions on their own lawns, they get understandably testy with the water being “lavished” on golf courses. The ACSP program can help golfers dispel the idea that golf courses are not eco-friendly.

- I am deeply concerned about environmental issues. Wildlife is a key interest to many of us who live here. We value the birds, wildcat, coyotes, even our four alligators. Also, golf courses

will be at peril if we don’t deal with water issues. Ours is the first in Citrus County to get grey water.

- I belong to National Audubon and work as a volunteer at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The Audubon people always give golf courses a bum rap. I have argued with them and have even invited them to look at our golf course, but they have a mindset that golf courses are bad, using too much water, fertilizer, pesticides. etc. I felt differently and knew that our course was a great place, abundant with wildlife, and very environmentally friendly. As chairman of the Audubon Committee I have tried to educate the members through our monthly column in the newsletter and on our Web site about the standards we meet to keep our certification. Our membership appreciates the efforts of our superintendent and the entire main-

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tenance staff in keeping us certified.

- It is a deep-seeded appreciation for nature and the beauty of species, a desire to play a role in shaping our tomorrow, a way of saying thank you for the great environment we live and play in. It is a way of being a part of something that is very special, a way of learning more about our world by working with our neighbors and people responsible for our course maintenance. It is simply a means by which we help to make this a better world.

- Before our superintendent came here, we had not been aware of the Audubon program. However, he had successfully completed certification at his previous course, and after he presented the information to the board of directors and green committee, we were quickly excited to commence the process. Soon after that, he organized wildlife tours that were a huge success. That first year, almost 100 members were shown highlights of the course from a different perspective, and that program continues today, six years later.

What value do you feel the ACSP has added to your golf course membership and to your golfing experience?

- Motivation... there are many golf communities but very few with a genuine and primary focus on combining the beauty of nature with the wildlife inhabitants so as to improve the living experience of both as we enjoy a round of golf. Certification is hard to achieve but worth the effort.

- It has helped raise member aware-

ness of the value of conservation practices. I'm not sure that the course, *per se*, is more beautiful as a result, but we feel better about it.

- The golfers take more interest in the wildlife and have more interest in protecting them and learning about their behaviors and habitats. We have raised quail to reintroduce them to the course; we have put up over 100 blue-bird boxes made by a member; we take evening rides and walks to check on the baby alligators; members have stocked the ponds and fish in them; turtle platforms have been put in the ponds, made by members. Money has also been donated for trees.

Many facilities struggle with how to get their members and golfers involved in environmental projects. What advice could you offer other courses on how to encourage participation in environmental stewardship projects?

- Our members are really into wildlife, and having the certification encourages their interest.

- Participation must start with leadership and communication. Our superintendent is committed to the process and his enthusiasm is captivating. With knowledgeable and informed leadership by management and membership, an ever-expanding vision of "what could be" soon becomes "what is." A round of golf becomes more than 18 holes. It's an opportunity to spend four hours in a truly unique environment with expanded horizons and visual experiences that enhances the adventure. This

is especially true if one is an amateur golfer... and we all are!

- We have a kayaking group with over 60 members. I provide information on the area birds and initiatives to protect endangered species. The community made a large contribution to a fund to save 3 Sisters Springs that harbor manatees in the winter. We bring in naturalists, Audubon Society members, and members with special knowledge to share. This all translates to a wider environmental consciousness that has supported the initiative. We also made a commitment to this project as a key item on the interview process for a new golf course superintendent. He has been a terrific asset to the program.

- Perhaps there should be an increase in exposure in magazines that golfers read, who will then encourage the superintendent to undertake the certification process. Marketing in superintendent magazines is not enough. Almost all superintendents are aware of the Audubon program; they probably just need a little encouragement from their membership to get started.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Audubon International recently released a report called "Golf's Green Bottom Line: Uncovering the Hidden Business Value of Environmental Stewardship on Golf Courses." This report clearly documents a business value associated with environmental stewardship on golf courses. You can download this report at <http://auduboninternational.org/PDFs/GolfsGreenBottomLine2009.pdf>. ■



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PROVEN SOLUTIONS

A BIG Master Plan



GREEN SIDE UP
By JOEL JACKSON

We know BMP stands for Best Management Practice. A large number of Florida agricultural and green industry commodities, in cooperation with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, have developed and published Best Management Practice manuals for their industries.

Mike Thomas with the Non-Point Source Pollution Department of FLDEP has been the point person for many of these BMP projects as the state sought to work with industries to protect the state's water quality by helping industries document ways to minimize unintended inputs to the environment.

In January 2007, several years of collaborative work paid off. Input by a committee of state, county and water-district regulators, university researchers, golf course superintendents, designers, managers and owners, plus representatives from the Sierra Club and 1,000 Friends of Florida culminated in the publica-

tion of a set of Golf Course BMPs. The official title is Best Management Practices for the Enhancement of Environmental Quality on Florida Golf Courses.

This publication already has provided a greater level of awareness and education to local governments about the complex and professional ways superintendents manage golf course maintenance practices. In many of the recent local fertilizer ordinances, the fertilizer management recommendations contained in the Golf BMPs are cited as the method golf courses are to follow when applying nitrogen and phosphorous in those cities and counties having new laws.

Thus, golf courses have had the benefit of continuing to operate under a rule which recognizes sound science rather than the well-intended but short-sighted "summer black-out periods" placed on residential and commercial landscape fertilizing. Why the Green Industry BMP Manual (for landscapers and homeowners), which also contains the same credible science is not cited more, remains a mystery.

As concerns over the environment continue to escalate, especially sources and uses of water, fears about pesticide residues and carbon dioxide emissions, we need to find a way to demonstrate more forcefully that golf courses are committed to being positive environmental and economic community assets.

The Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary program has been a viable program in which courses can receive advice and assistance in documenting current practices and

offer a certification program for demonstrating a course's ability to adapt, adopt, and – most importantly – verify environmentally sound practices.

Another program that has earned a lot of respect was the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program. It is an industry- and state-coordinated program which certifies properties in the training and implementation of turfgrass management BMPs.

Our Florida Golf BMP manual has received a lot of notice around the country and several associations have been asking how it was written and produced. The point is that BMPs are gaining more importance nationwide and we need to think seriously about how we can develop a program that can help us showcase our innate environmental stewardship that still goes mostly undocumented.

At a time when water use on turfgrass is coming under more scrutiny than ever before, we need a vehicle to formally unify all golf courses so our voice becomes stronger and more credible. One way to do that is to have all golf courses become members of our own Florida Golf Course or Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program. I would suggest that courses that have already achieved ACSP certification or are actively participating in the program would be recognized as being in compliance with the BMP based program.

The best example of industry solidarity and credibility occurred recently when 97 percent of Georgia's golf courses signed pledges to endorse and follow the Georgia Golf Course Water

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Conservation BMPs. So when, GGCSA representatives argued for easing the draconian water restrictions imposed on golf courses, they spoke from a position of strength and not just good intentions.

We need our FGCSA members and courses to go on the record, sign up, document practices and become certified in the Florida Golf BMPs. We can do it now voluntarily and take control of our destiny or we can wait to fight nit-picking regulations imposed upon our management practices.

By showing such initiative, perhaps we can get our BMPs adopted as a rule by the state and consider it a Big Master Plan we can all use in common for the economic and environmental success of golf in Florida.