

Very little recreational area kept well in U.S.

Outdoor sports and recreation appear to be important ingredients in the American way of life.

Just consider the acreage of land devoted to grassed recreation areas in the country. Yet aside from that acreage devoted to golf, very little of it is really of a quality that we can accept or be proud of.

In a recent trade journal there were two very appropriate articles that addressed the problem.

One article, entitled "Setting Priorities for Public Athletic Fields," by Dr. Elliott C. Roberts of Pleasant Hill, Tenn., clearly defines the national attitudes and delineates the problems and suggests remedies.

The second, "Common Mistakes in Sports Turf Management," by Dr. Henry W. Indyk of Rutgers University, is even more specific as to why we have so few adequate grass recreational surfaces.

This isn't a local or regional problem; it is nationwide.

We might wonder why this phenomenon exists. Most of our professional grounds managers and turf specialists do know. We are exposed to the problems on our jobs daily. We read countless articles in the many good journals that cross our desks. We listen to conference speakers regularly through the seasons. And yet, to this time, little has changed in the development or maintenance of quality grassed recreational surfaces.

In my 30-plus years as a turfgrass agronomist, I have had few privileges of being involved with proper construction and adequate maintenance of grassed recreational fields.

Despite better grasses, renovation and maintenance equipment, pesticides and improved specifications, I don't find many heavily used recreational fields that are much better today than they were 30 years ago.

We all know that funding priorities for the development and maintenance of field recreation sites are the major cause of our problems and our frustration. Until we are able to collectively alter these priorities, our problems will continue.

Perhaps, if we can work together as a group to promote the cause and to show the real justification for our efforts, we can make progress. It has to be a joint effort.

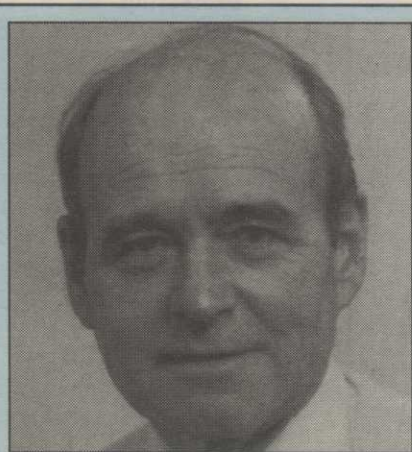
Maintenance

In the meantime, let's consider what we can do with what we have. Let us start with maintenance.

As far as growing grass is concerned, we have both some pluses and minuses in the Northeast. For the pluses we generally have light-textured soil that doesn't compact badly and that may drain reasonably well. We are in a reasonably high rainfall area where irrigation requirements shouldn't be demanding.

Our growing season temperatures are moderate, which permit us to successfully grow all the best cool-season grasses.

On the negative side, our soils tend



Professor C. Richard Skogley, a much honored turfgrass management specialist at the University of Rhode Island, will retire in December.

He has served at URI since 1960.

His research has dealt with applied management and has included weed control, fertilizer, maintenance practices, electric soil warning, water protection of golf greens and varietal evaluation.

He has released five improved turfgrasses through URI efforts in grass improvement.

Skogley received bachelor's and master's degrees in agronomy at URI in 1950-52, worked as assistant agronomist there from 1951 to 1953, was at Rutgers University from 1953 to 1960 and received his PhD there in 1957. At Rutgers he served as research assistant and associate from 1953 to 1957 and Cooperative Extension Service specialist in turf management from 1957 to 1960.

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to be thin, acidic and infertile. Our growing season may be a bit on the short side, which may reduce time available to carry out renovation projects.

Considerations in maintenance include:

1. Take an inventory of your conditions—soil, grasses and general field conditions. Is there potential, given the budget for a proper maintenance program, to develop a quality surface, or is it so bad that the effort would be wasted?

2. Use soil tests to determine the chemical condition of your fields.

3. Establish and maintain a liming and fertilization program, indicated by soil test results, that recognizes the extent of use of the fields involved. Within reason, the heavier the use the more intensive a maintenance program must be.

4. Establish a program of insect and weed control, aerification and top-dressing. These should be standard, annual maintenance practices.

5. Develop a mowing program that keeps pace with grass growth—not according to set schedules. Cut grass as high as field use will permit. Try to keep it at two inches, or above, except during the cool portions of the growing season.

Establish an irrigation program, that, when needed, provides for infrequent, deep watering. It is better to under-water than to over-water.

6. If your fields consist of improved varieties of turfgrasses and if you are providing a good management program, diseases should not be a regular or serious problem.

Always be aware that diseases can occur, and quickly, and be prepared to take corrective action if necessary. A wide array of good fungicides is available, but you need to know which

to use for particular diseases.

7. If maintenance questions arise, don't hesitate to contact your area Extension agent or specialist or neighboring golf course superintendent for advice. You might be surprised how much help is available.

Renovation

Now to renovation. Most heavily used fields will require annual renovation—which then becomes part of annual maintenance. It is common, even for good fields, to be

thinned by heavy use each year. The requirement then is to reintroduce seed to help thicken the stand. Where heavy renovations are required, I suggest the following:

1. Use a plug-type aerifier and go over the fields several times—each in a different direction. Aerify as deeply as possible. Leave the soil cores on the surface to dry.

2. Top-dress the field, at least all low areas and badly thinned areas, with a screened sandy loam-type material. Light textured composts would be ideal.

3. Drag the field with a mat to distribute evenly the top dressing and to break up the soil cores left after aerification.

4. Apply fertilizer—possibly a starter type to get the seedlings off to a good start.

5. Use a slicer-seeder to incorporate the seed into the field. Use improved perennial ryegrasses and possibly some Kentucky bluegrass for overseeding of heavily used fields. Fine fescues (chewings or hard fescue) may be added for less heavily used sites.

6. Drag the field again after seeding.

7. Keep the surface moist to permit seed germination and seedling growth.

8. Provide weed control. Eliminate both annual and perennial weeds before or after seeding as required. This is a critical requirement.

9. When new seedlings are established and have been mown two to three times, apply a maintenance-type fertilizer. This is also very important to hasten re-establishment.

I recognize that these suggestions may require some specialized equipment. Unfortunately, I don't know many successful shortcuts. If we want quality turf, we must pay for it.

I also didn't mention timing of application or operation. Unfortunately, also, we often must work around the use schedule of the particular fields. Timing does influence success or failure.

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