

# W-A-T-E-R would spell relief in Calif.

BY PETER BLAIS

California golf courses are dealing with a five-year drought that has led to watering restrictions, regional battles over water, charges of unfair allocations, forced conversions to effluent and proposals to build multi-billion-dollar seawater desalination plants.

Santa Barbara has been among the hardest hit. Basically a desert area that runs down to the sea, Santa Barbara has been in Phase III restrictions for more than a year, according to LaCumbre Golf & Country Club superintendent Doug Weddle.

For residents that means no washing cars or watering lawns. For golf courses, it means doing with 15 to 20 percent less water than historical needs. A defective water meter at LaCumbre established an even lower historical figure than the course's actual water use, Weddle said. Consequently, the course gets 50 percent less water than it used four years ago.

LaCumbre received 4-3/4 inches of rain the last 18 months, one-fifth its normal rate. Normally, Weddle could supplement his watering from the course's 31-acre lake. But it has been dry for three years.

"We put a blue line around it just to keep the handicap fair," Weddle said.

Santa Barbara superintendents can use their allotment as they see fit. Weddle waters greens and tees as needed. Rroughs haven't been watered in 18 months. Fairways get 50 percent of their needs. That has left some fairways thinner, browner and with more weeds than he would like, but has freed some of the precious liquid for the many trees that line the course.

"If a tree dies, you may never see one on that spot again in your lifetime. But you can always replace grass," Weddle reasoned.

Wells were pumped so low this summer that salt water invaded parts of the Santa Barbara aquifer. That led to summer patch on six LaCumbre greens before new wells were dug, Weddle said.

To minimize growth, Santa Barbara never tied into the state water system that draws water from the Colorado River and Northern California. Instead the city tapped the Lake Cachuma watershed. The move maintained a smaller-town atmosphere, said Raymond Davies, president of the Golf Course Association of Southern California and superintendent at Virginia Country Club in Long Beach. But the drought has left Lake Cachuma "virtually dry."

The water problem is so acute local officials are considering building a multi-billion-dollar desalination plant, Weddle said. The facility would require tremendous amounts of energy. A nuclear plant would be the most practical power source, although licensing a new plant in environment-conscious California would seem unlikely. Trucking or shipping water from Alaska is also being considered.

Farther north, Monterey Peninsula courses have rationed water the past 18 months, receiving 20 percent less than they did in the 1987 base year, according to California GCSA President D.J. Pakkala. All courses are watering tees, greens and fairways, Pakkala said. Some have had to tighten belts, while others have more water than they need. The reason is the way the base was determined.

Rainfall can vary considerably within a very few miles on the Peninsula, Pakkala said. Courses receiving little rain watered heavily in 1987 and are consequently allocated more water today. Those drenched in 1987 watered lightly and are receiving less now.

"It's not an equitable way to allocate water," said Pakkala. "We'd like to see the water district use a 10-year average."

Variations are necessary for special projects, like watering a new seeding. Pebble Beach received an extra allocation for a kikuyu grass eradication and ryegrass overseeding program in preparation for the 1992 U.S. Open.

In Southern California, water has been rationed in Los Angeles County and fines levied at courses exceeding their allocations, Davies said.

Proposed ordinances in Los Angeles and Irvine would severely restrict planting turf and other landscaping features found on golf courses.

But despite receiving less than half its average annual rainfall, the area has suffered less than expected because it is tied into the state water system. The system includes a line that loops around San Francisco, a sore point with Northern Californians. While Southern California has largely avoided restrictions because of the imported water, the Bay Area has cut back. The situation angers Northern Californians and led to a sort of "civil war over water," Davies said. Northern legislators have proposed cutting Southern water supplies 40 percent.

The drought quickened the conversion to effluent, Davies said. Despite having its own wells, the city required Virginia CC to convert to treated water a year-and-a-half ago. Several older

greens, particularly where nitrates and salt pooled, suffered turf damage.

"They (city) basically put a gun to our heads," Davies said. "All six of the city's courses are now on effluent."

A return to normal rainfalls may be in sight, according to Davies. Ocean temperatures are running 10 degrees above normal. Such conditions historically give rise to El Nino winds bringing moisture from Baja.

"We're hopeful," said Davies, whose course historically averages about 12 inches of annual rainfall. "The last time this happened we got 30 inches."

In Santa Barbara, Weddle would be happy with the area's average 16-inch annual rainfall. But it would take more than 30 inches over the next six months before the water districts would consider lifting restrictions, he said.

## NEWS

The central and desert areas have been less affected by the dry conditions.

"Our chapter hasn't had any major problems, yet," said William Griffith, superintendent at Belmont Country Club in Fresno and president of the GCSA of Central California. "Some courses have been asked to cut back on a volunteer basis, but there haven't been any restrictions."

Ironically, the Palm Springs area may be the least affected by the drought.

"We're sitting on one of the largest underground aquifers in the world," said Ross James O'Fee, superintendent at The Springs Club in Palm Desert and president of the Hi-Lo Desert GCSA.

# JOIN THE TURF CLUB



Membership has its advantages. Kubota offers the most reliable mowing and verticutting unit on earth—the Verti-Reel.

Built for total turf maintenance whether you have golf courses, sports fields, sod farms or commercial mowing applications, the Verti-Reel provides verticutting and mowing in one proven unit.

Verticut 18 holes in less than a day. Outcuts triplex mowers. Easy mowing/verticutting head changeover. Power pack mounted conveniently on tractor's three-point hitch. Direct drive hydraulics for consistent cutting speed.

How your tractor performs can have a significant impact on the efficiency of your operations. Kubota excels with direct-injection diesel engines in both the M4030SU Turf Special and L3250F Turf Special for greater power, performance and economy.

The advantages of Turf Club membership are numerous. To find out more, write Kubota Tractor Corp., P.O. Box 7020-T, Compton, CA 90224-7020.



**KUBOTA**

Nothing like it on earth.™