

# Michigan golf summit puts issues into perspective

By Bradley S. Klein

The temperature outside had plummeted over the weekend into the 20s, an annoying reminder that golf in Michigan is a seasonal affair. But the 200 participants in Michigan Golf Summit II, who met Nov. 4-5 in Ypsilanti, were drawn there out of concern for other kinds of climate, namely legislative and economic.

Sponsored by the Continuing Education Division of Eastern Michigan University and Michigan Golfer Magazine, the meeting brought together golf association directors, state government officials, journalists and golf facility owner/managers. They exchanged ideas and sometimes crossed swords over



Numbers in parentheses are national ranking.

the future of the phenomenal golf boom that has overtaken the state.

The chief issue in Michigan golf is defining and regulating wetlands. The Environmental Protection Agency is involved in complex negotiations about what constitutes a wetland. With so much land in northern Michigan devoted, or planned, for golf, the parameters of that decision will have an enormous impact on the game's growth.

One high-profile resort project, The Homestead, with land adjacent to Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, is caught up in a jurisdictional dispute between the EPA and the state's Department of Natural Resources.

Meanwhile, a fascinating roundtable on "Golf and the Environment: A Compatible Twosome?" focused on cooperative efforts among superintendents, naturalists, and scientists in taking proactive measures to ensure environmentally sound practices.

## SLOWPOKES AND THE MEDIA

Each panel represented diverse and sometimes conflicting views. Even a session devoted to "Slaying the Slow Play Dragon" managed to become controversial.

Jerry Comeau, manager of the municipal St. Clair Shores Country Club, argued that rewards (like a free ball and pack of tees) for timely play on the front nine can expedite play.

A more aggressive approach was outlined by Michael Bylen, general manager of the daily-fee Pine Trace Golf Course, who advocates pulling slow groups off the course after nine holes and refunding half of their greens fee.

On the other hand, Oakland Hills Country Club has taken the more literary approach of writing letters of complaint to slowpokes. The result has been a dramatic reduction in average playing time the past four years, from 4 hours 43 minutes to 3 hours 55 minutes.

Panelists agreed it is not the function of media to serve as industry handmaidens.

Jack Berry, golf writer for the Detroit News, opened a few eyes with a straightforward account of how difficult it is for one correspondent to cover an entire sport statewide. He encouraged members of the golf community to make more effective efforts to publicize good stories.

In response to criticism about too much "negative" news, Lynn Henning, editor of PGA Magazine, reaffirmed the integrity of the journalist's craft as simply getting at the truth—a truth, he said, "that is not always positive."

It remains to be seen whether Michigan will get a golf council like those in Florida and Arizona. There are great differences in the interests of the golf resort owners, who tend to be up north, and the private clubs, many of which are in the south.

Moreover, the limited means available to the many family-owned operations may preclude their participation in a statewide effort that might benefit only some sectors of the industry.



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