

Merit Club's 320 acres protected as open space

GURNEE, Ill. — Bert Getz, owner of the Merit Club here, has announced the 320-acre, 21-hole golf course has been protected as permanent open space.

Getz recently granted a conservation easement to CorLands, the real estate affiliate of the non-profit Chicago-based Openlands Project. Regardless of any changes in ownership, the land will retain its natural character for perpetuity. The gently rolling course features wetland and prairie restorations, scenic open spaces and thousands of trees. It is a member of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System.

"When I decided to convert our family farm into the Merit Club, the goal all along was to save the scenic and natural character of the land," said Getz. "I've owned the property for 25 years and didn't want to see it paved or roofed over. Granting a conservation easement completes my efforts to save the site's beauty for future generations."

Getz began working with CorLands to



Merit Club sets an example as open space in preservation program.

establish the easement in 1991. Details of the arrangement were finalized this fall.

"The Merit Club is a particularly exciting project for CorLands," said Tom Hahn, the organization's director. "Not only is it a model in environmentally sensitive golf course design, but it also sets an example for other owners who realize that the open space their courses provide in areas of rapid growth is invaluable."

The easement eliminates the potential for any commercial/office or residential development on the 320-acre site. Buildings may only be constructed in two designated "Maintenance" and "Club House Facility" zones (totaling 15 acres) and must be directly related to operation of the golf course. If the golf course operation ceases for any reason, the land must remain open and be allowed to revert to its natural state.

These restrictions apply even if the land is sold, thus preserving the site for perpetuity.

According to Oscar Miles, Merit Club superintendent, the easement protects several unique amenities. The course has 75 acres devoted to prairie restoration, with roughly 30 varieties of prairie plants; 30 acres of wetlands; a 30-acre oak and hickory savannah; and a two-acre nursery. It has 2,200 trees (1,400 of them were originally on the site, 800 have been planted), with another 500 trees in the nursery.

The Merit Club is a private course that has been open since 1992. It was designed by Chicago golf professional Ed Oldfield and golf course architect Robert Lohmann. In addition to an 18-hole course, the Merit Club features a unique practice area that includes three practice holes.

The Merit Club is one of many private properties CorLands has helped protect throughout metropolitan Chicago. CorLands also negotiated a conservation easement for the 190-acre, 27-hole Old Wayne Golf Course in DuPage County.

As well as helping private landowners preserve land, CorLands helps public agencies obtain land for public open space by assisting them in negotiation and innovative financing, and by serving as an interim landowner.

Endangered Species Act expected to expand protected animals, plants

Continued from page 43

species' extinction.

Baucus' proposal would also strictly curtail any independent peer reviews of federal rulings on endangered species.

For years, environmentalists have bitterly complained that these peer review panels have been nothing more than a delaying tactic used by businesses to postpone endangered species protection.

Says David Wilcove, a Washington, D.C.-based ecologist who wholeheartedly supports the Baucus proposal: "There is no doubt that species under the current act are often listed too late — rather than too soon — resulting in more expensive recoveries."

In the past, pro-business interests have always had a great fear of the Endangered Species Act because its rulings take precedence over all other environmental laws.

It's also extremely frustrating, they say, because its implementation can be so fickle and unpredictable.

"Being suddenly subject to the Endangered Species Act could be as simple as a rare butterfly suddenly showing up on your land," said

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— Ecologist David Wilcove

Lawrence Turner, Washington, D.C.-based program manager for the EPA's Endangered Species Protection Program. "Or, if the EPA determines that an insect happens to be a pollinator of an endangered plant nearby, that could do it, too."

According to Don Knott, a senior vice president at Robert Trent Jones II in Palo Alto, Calif., the appearance of the checker spot butterfly was enough to completely destroy plans for the development of a \$10 million golf course in California's San Mateo County.

And in Washington's Puget Sound, he said, the discovery of an eagle scotched development of a \$30 million project that would have featured 36 holes and substantial tracts of housing.

"Unfortunately, there are a lot of anti-growth groups who are using the Endangered Species Act as an excuse to

stop development like these," Knott said.

Existing golf courses are also constantly at risk, pro-business interests say, since new Endangered Species rulings often place new limits — or even outright bans — on the chemicals they use to control weeds and pests.

"Right now, most herbicides are at risk under the act," said John Thorne, a researcher who tracks pest chemical regulation for the National Agricultural Chemicals Association in Washington, D.C. "And while 755 species are currently listed as endangered, we anticipate 400 more will soon be added."

In all, 3,800 new species are being considered for listing under the act, Thorne said.

Those who believe the Endangered Species Act too often coddles rare bugs at the expense of human beings can take heart in HR.1490.

It's a House bill offered up by House Rep. Bill Tauzin (D-Louisiana), that is supposed to represent a middle ground between pro-growth and anti-growth forces.

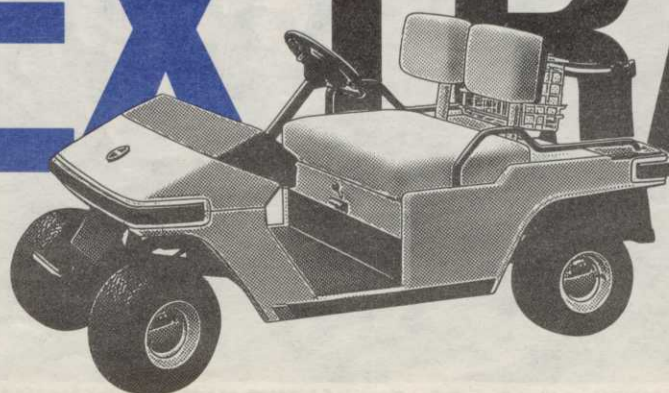
Specifically, Tauzin said his approach would rewrite the act so regulators can take more of a preventive, rather than "emergency-room" approach to species preservation.

The new rules would accomplish this, he said, by developing cooperative management agreements between government, private landowners, environmentalists, and other interested parties which would track and attempt to protect at-risk species even before they are listed as endangered.

Moreover, Tauzin said he would only allow "verifiable science" to be used in classifying a species as endangered. And he wants to guarantee golf courses and other businesses the right to independent peer reviews for any proposed ruling that would stop development, or limit the methods and tools they now use to fight pests.

In essence, Tauzin said his legislative alternative would create "an Endangered Species Act that works better for all species, including people."

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