

## Is golfing greener?

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Brunswick County illustrates the need for better siting, design and construction standards. This course was sited and designed before the environmental principles adopted by the golfing industry became available.

It is located immediately adjacent to a primary fish nursery area and open shellfishing waters. It was approved by the state with standard requirements for erosion control. Since construction started, the course has received repeated State inspection reports stating that it is out of compliance with erosion control standards. One report states that the degree of damage to the environment has been severe.

Recent water quality studies in Sunset Beach and Calabash indicate that golf courses are contributing nutrients to coastal waters. Estuaries are susceptible to nutrient pollution. Nutrients can accelerate eutrophication resulting in algal blooms, reduced transparency, undesirable shifts in algal and fish populations, and even fish kills.

These studies found that Chlorophyll Total Nitrogen, and Total Phosphorus values in areas which drain golf courses are comparable to areas which drain high density, septic tank dependent areas.

If courses are sited directly adjacent to fragile estuaries without significant vegetated buffers, the impact of fertilizer use even at agronomic rates can be unacceptable.

The environmental benefits of improved operation and management will never compensate for poor site selection since it only takes minimal disturbance to alter the productive ecological balance of coastal estuaries. Coastal waters simply have little tolerance for pollution.

Golf courses attract associated real estate development. The magnitude of this attraction is described in the *Wilmington Morning Star* (October 19, 1997) article entitled, "Land Rush: Sales Boom at Brunswick County Golf Communities."

The article quotes a local realtor saying, "There's still a lot of dirt to sell in Brunswick County." This additional development magnifies the environmental damage to the coastal environment. If better sites for golf courses are selected, then it is likely that this development will also be attracted to more environmentally compatible locations.

Significant progress has been made in the last five years in our understanding of golf courses and the environment. It is my impression that the operation and management practices at golf courses have improved with the help of this new information. The focus should now be on improving the selection of sites for new golf courses.

Voluntary measures that encourage improved site selection will only be marginally effective as long as conscientious developers are forced to compete with developers who profit by taking advantage of rules that allow significant environmental degradation. The only way to level the playing field is to adopt minimum rules for avoiding the environmentally sensitive coastal areas.

This is an objective that the environmental and golfing community should accomplish together over the next five years.

# Golf Course Classifieds

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