

Controlling elk damage key to winter prep in Canadian Rockies

By HAL PHILLIPS

BANFF, Alberta, Canada — Here at Banff Springs Golf Club, winter preparation is complicated by the sexual desires of elk. Autumn is mating season for these 1,200-pound beasts, who congregate in huge numbers on the golf course, a 1926 Stanley Thompson design located in a wildlife corridor pinched between mountains Rundle and Tunnel.

"We'll have more than 300 elk on the course every day during the fall, whereas we have only 100 or so during the summer," said Kevin Pattison, head superintendent at Banff Springs. "I have to laugh when I say that; 100 elk would be plenty for most superintendents."

Come Sept. 1, Pattison and his crew routinely segue into late-season mode. There is dung removal — a daily chore with triple the number of elk on site. In terms of man hours, mowing and grooming the greens goes from a 15-hour job to a 21-hour job, because smoothing elk footprints with dry sand and removing larger indentations with mechanical ball forks take time.

"Every 10 days or so, we'll have an elk create a waller," Pattison explained. "What happens is, the bull elk takes his antlers and sticks them into the ground; he rakes them back and forth to sharpen

them up. This is what they do to prepare for rutting [mating] action. Unfortunately, they like to do this on the greens, and when they're done, it looks as though someone has literally roto-tilled an area



Banff Spring GC has dramatic mountain setting, but also an abundant number of troublesome elk



about six feet square. The biggest piece of turf left over is no bigger than the size of my hand!

"We pick each of these waller areas clean, rake them smooth and replace the turf pieces as if we were doing a jigsaw puzzle," he said. "Then we roll it smooth and top dress it very lightly — if you use too much sand, it smothers the plant."

FENCING IN THE GREENS

As you can see, prepping a golf course for winter here in the Canadian Rockies

calls for extreme measures. However, in going to these extremes, Pattison believes he has hit upon several measures germane to any superintendent whose course closes during the winter months.

Traditionally, the elk's rutting season comes to a close by the end of September, and the course closes to play on Canadian Thanksgiving (Oct. 9 this year). That's when the real work begins, though in some ways it has already begun.

"To set us up for a good summer season, we start in the late summer before," Pattison said. "For example, that's when we take soil tests and adjust our fertility program to correct any inadequacies."

"The first week we close, we will aerate the greens, remove the cores, apply a light top dressing, and apply Milorganite to reduce ice damage," he explained.

"Then we'll surround every green with special fencing comprised of mesh panels that are 6 feet tall and 10 feet long. This fencing is unique. The panels are self-supporting, so you don't need to worry about frozen ground or damaging irrigation pipe with stakes. The panels are extremely easy to handle, which is important because we're in there two or three times a winter to clear snow from the greens."

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Supers getting courses ready for cold weather

By JOEL JOYNER

NORTHEAST

FAYETTEVILLE, N.Y. — At the Onondaga Golf and Country Club, superintendent Eric Holm has his winter preparation down to a 'T' after 15 years on the job. With long winters and a lot of accumulated snowfall here in central New York State, Holm hopes for a "consistent snow cover until January and a nice gradual melt" to begin a new season.

After aerating the greens in mid-September and again in a one-month to six-week period, Holm will begin fertilizing toward the end of October. "As far as top dressing the greens, I used to give them a light brushing late in the year," said Holm, "but I found I had too much injury. I've discontinued that and have had no detrimental effects." On the course, Holm maintains five wind-exposed greens with "evergreen wind covers" to prevent desiccation.

In early October, Holm uses a "single-rate application of Scotts FS2 on the greens to prevent pink snow mold." Between the end of November to mid-December, another single-rate application of Scotts FS2 is used on the greens, tees, and fairways. "Generally, when it looks like winter is really bearing down on us," Holm said, "I also apply Scotts fungicide #5 for protection against gray snow mold."

"My greens have a great three inches of 100 percent sand top dressing that I've added since I've been here, so I really don't have to prepare them for any drainage prior to winter," said Holm. "We do a

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EP AERATION

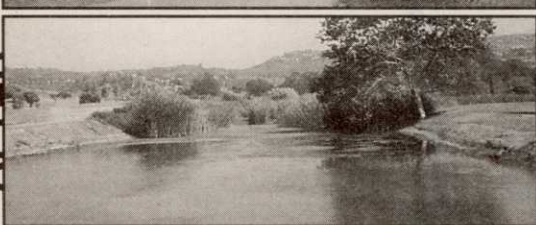
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Elk control at Banff Springs

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Pattison believes this methodical snow removal during the winter months is preferable to relying on covers.

REMOVING SNOW FROM GREENS

"We start doing snow removal with hand blowers in February, and we'll leave three to four inches on the greens at that time" he said. "In March we do it again. Then, in April, we take all of the snow right off the greens and monitor them daily to make sure there's no standing water. Once the greens have been cleared and there's no remaining ice on them, only then do we cover them.

"If you do end up with ice," he added, "it's easier to melt it from the bottom up; so as you clear them, the sun heats up the Milorganite prill which floats to the top of the ice. When it gets cold again, the prill goes back down to the bottom, creating a honeycomb - that's perfect because it allows the gas exchange

'We start doing snow removal with hand blowers in February, and we'll leave three to four inches on.'

- Kevin Pattison

from turf plants to escape."

Pattison deals with certain greens that feature depressions where water traditionally sits or moves very slowly. "In those areas we cut a hole down to the gravel layer with a cup cutter, then we install a PVC sleeve to ensure that it doesn't collapse," he said. "The benefit of this, if you have melting, is the water will move into this low area - now you have a sump, and you can either pump that little sump out, or if it's thawed, the water moves right into the gravel layer and doesn't pond up in the spring."

Off the greens, Pattison will aerate the layout wall to wall following course closure. However, he leaves the cores on these fairways and rough areas.

"In the spring, they disintegrate during the snow melt," he said. "Also, when the wind blows, the cores help retain a thin layer of snow for insulation. This is particular to our situation here, but when elk urinate in winter, this layer of cores also gives the urine a place to pool, which makes for smaller urine spots. We average more than 750 urine spots per fairway. On the 18th fairway this past winter, we had

2,053 urine spots! And they're not just discolored; those spots are dead - too much nitrogen for the plant to synthesize. So naturally we prefer the urine to pool, which minimizes the overall turf kill."

SODDING THE CAULDRON

The signature hole at Banff Springs is number four, a stunning par-3 called The Cauldron. As the moniker suggests, the

green is located in a low-lying area, flush against an 9577-foot peak. No amount of winter prep has proved effective at the Cauldron, whose green routinely dies each winter.

The solution? "We strip the sod off and prep it for sodding the day the golf



course closes; then we sod it the last week in April. It costs about \$6,200 [Canadian] each year to re-sod that green," Pattison said. "We started this last year and it looks like we'll do it every year from now on.

"In years past, it took forever for the green to come

back each spring, and often times it didn't come back, which meant we were sodding it in June. Now we can guarantee that we have a viable putting surface every spring, and it's easier to establish the sod in the spring, before the heat of the summer starts to kick in.

"It's more work, but it's one helluva a team-building exercise for new hires each spring." ■



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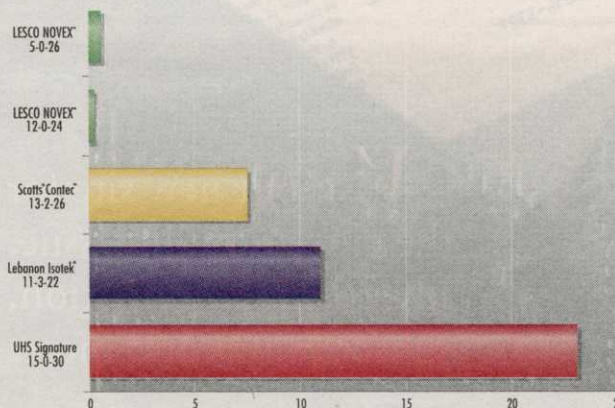
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