

Drought conditions linger in Western U.S.

WASHINGTON—The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reported in its latest seasonal drought assessment that conditions should improve across the Midwest and into the High Plains, while limited improvement is expected across the West outside of the Great Basin and the Southwest.

The forecast improvement does not necessarily mean the end of drought problems, according to NOAA officials, because it will take a long time to eradicate drought in areas where moisture deficits are especially large, such as western Nebraska and western

South Dakota. Some locations in northwestern Missouri, where low



water supplies may persist, have gone 10 consecutive months with below-normal precipitation. Farther north, with relatively less rainfall expected in northern South

Dakota and North Dakota, drought may largely persist.

Long-term moisture deficits still prevail across much of the West, so even the normal mountain snow pack observed in some states this spring will not be enough to bring significant relief to water supplies except in scattered locations. In many western areas, water shortages are expected to continue through July. The odds for improvement in the hydrological drought are lowest in the Great Basin and the Southwest due to low snow pack or the limited precipitation expected during this time of the year.

Golf 20/20 approves school program pilot

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla.—The executive board of Golf 20/20 approved the test strategy for a National School Golf Program and has targeted the 2003-2004 school year for a pilot program.

The primary focus of the program, which is designed to give children a positive first experience

in golf, will be to provide schools with a curriculum, equipment and training for physical education teachers. Schools that accept the program will be asked to implement it for two weeks in the fall and two weeks in the spring. The test program is aimed at 80 to 100 schools across the country. About half of

these schools will receive funding from the golf industry through Golf 20/20. The remaining schools have local funding sources available.

Benna S. Cawthorn, a former physical education teacher and youth sports program director in the Orlando area, has been hired as director of the program.

NGF report shows lower participation rates in 2002

JUPITER, Fla. — On the heels of its 2002 rounds played survey, the National Golf Foundation released its forecast for participation in 2003, which continues the trend of less than hopeful news coming out of the golf industry.

According to the "Golf Participation in the U.S., 2003" report, the number of total participants fell 1.1 percent to 36.7 million. The NGF said this was mainly driven by a 36.2 percent decrease in the use of golf ranges and alternative short courses.

These downturns overshadowed a 38.6 percent rise in the number of junior golfers (age five to 17) and a 1.6 percent rise in the number of golfers 18 and over. The NGF defines golfers as those who have played at least one regulation round of golf in the last 12 months.

The slide in the number of best customers, defined as those who either play 25 or more

rounds a year or who are members of households that spend more than \$1,000 a year on golf, may be of particular concern to the industry. In 2002, there were 8.9 million of these best customers (34 percent of total golfers) who accounted for 80 percent of the golf spending in the United States. This number was down 9 percent from the 2001 total of 9.8 million, which represented 40 percent of all golfers.

The NGF's participation report may also provide some insight into the drop in the total number of rounds played last year. The number of avid golfers (those who played 25 or more rounds a year) fell for the second straight year, which the NGF said likely fueled the drop in 2002 rounds played numbers.

One segment of the population that could contribute to future growth is women. Currently, only one-quarter of all golf participants are women.

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