

Sorry Kermit, but you don't have a monopoly on the subject of being green. Today's superintendents must address four or five definitions of "green" to be successful — or to even keep their jobs.

In a perfect world, a responsible superintendent's definition of a green golf course would probably be a healthy golf course — one that would perform profitably, be beneficial to the environment and meet the needs of the people who play the game. The world isn't perfect and green comes in many hues.

To the golf purists, green often means lush, soft turf with little or no roll. They want courses that are lean and mean. A little brown here and there doesn't bother them. But getting golfers to adopt that philosophy is next to impossible for a number of all the wrong reasons.

For example, resort operators and developers are selling a look or selling real estate. They want verdant fields of dreams. But you can't sell playing conditions in a brochure only with manicured green landscapes and golf courses. It can be the land of overwatering and overfertilization.

Conversely, being green to an environmental activist means being friendly to the environment. Green isn't even a color to them — it's a state of mind. We already have enough of the citizenry that perceives golf as being unfriendly.

Audubon International and the Center for Resource Management have made a superficial dent in that thinking with the Cooperative Sanctuary Program and the Golf and The Environment conferences. But we have a long way to go to get buy-in by the grassroots population.

To the owners and operators of the 16,000 golf courses across the United States, green is the color of money. Golf is big business. The pursuit of par is not always a holy crusade with reverent homage to old traditions, but often just a business plan to achieve a return on investment.

Trying to balance performance, profit and perception is the sticky wicket superintendents face in today's golf world. One day golfers are complaining about playing conditions, and the next day they're concerned about the guy in the moon suit spraying something on the greens. Meanwhile the owners are screaming about the budget and the profit margin.

It Ain't Easy Being Green, But It's Worth the Pain

BY JOEL JACKSON



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Television complicates the picture even more. The networks, including The Golf Channel, should do a better job of discussing the reality of tournament conditions. Quite frankly, I'm not unhappy that Pinehurst had a transition hiccup in its preparations for the U.S. Open in June. Like so many everyday golf courses, Pinehurst had a tough time with its overseeded collars around the greens.

Those blemishes didn't affect play, but they were cosmetically noticeable to the viewers. Since everyone knows Pinehurst has been preparing for the Open for years, it would have been a great time for the announcers to admit to the viewing public that Mother Nature often wins these battles with turf conditions.

Superimposed on all of this is the government's bureaucratic steamroller in the form of "politicians" in the EPA. If regulatory agencies were administered by business people and scientists instead of political appointees, maybe common sense and reason would prevail. Recently, EPA's science in the Clean Air Act implementation was successfully challenged in the courts. The Food Quality Protection Act may also be headed to that forum for debate.

The real answer to the question of being green is to utilize the best aspects of all of the above definitions. Golf doesn't need to become an industry like commercial fishing, which depletes its own resources.

Prudence and preservation combined with enthusiasm and education can keep golf green and superintendents successful, even if it ain't easy.

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