



Letting *Nature* Take Its *Course*

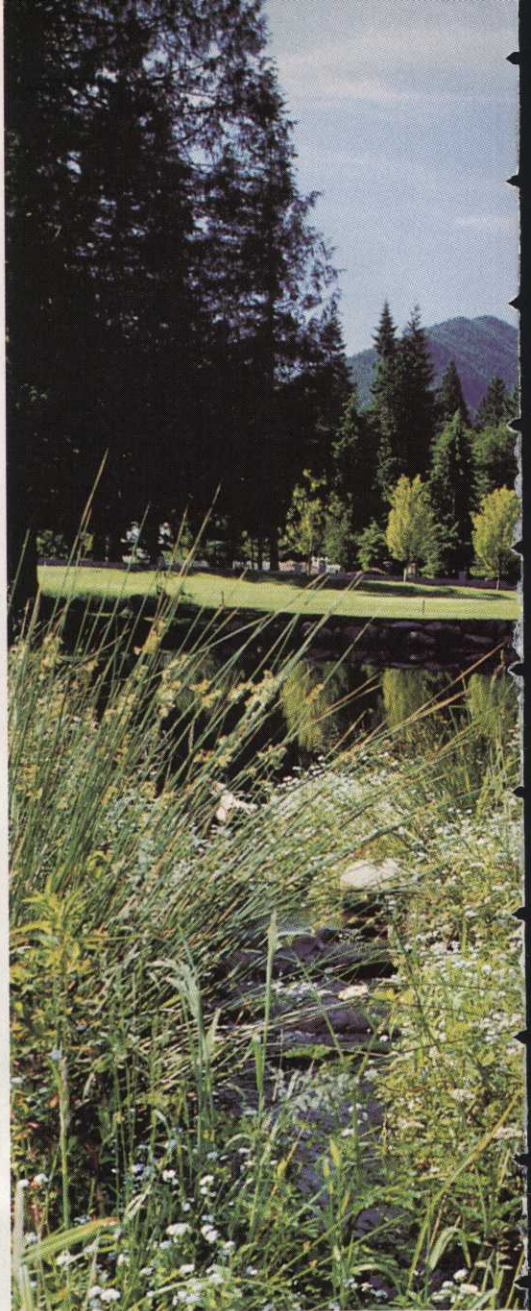
Two Oregon superintendents are
as dedicated to preserving wildlife
as they are to providing standout greens

BY LARRY AYLWARD,
EDITOR

You could say northwest Oregon superintendents Cliff Beckmann and Tony Lasher have heeded the call of the wild.

Beckmann, superintendent of Westin Salishan Lodge & Golf Resort in Glenden Beach, and Lasher, certified superintendent of The Resort at the Mountain in Welches, are proud to say they're naturalists when it comes to golf course maintenance.

That's no surprise considering their location, where environmentalism is a way of life and not a romantic inkling. Beckmann and Lasher are as dedicated to preserving wildlife on their courses as they are to providing standout greens.



The natural look

How would you feel if Sierra Club members picked *your* golf course for a visit? Bet you would be shaking in your work boots.

Tony Lasher admits he was nervous when members of the environmental group contacted him last summer to arrange a visit to The Resort at the Mountain, located near the pristine Mt. Hood National Forest. But the environmentally conscious Lasher, figuring he had nothing to hide, welcomed the visitors to his 27-hole course.

"The group's members are outspoken, and I was a little antsy about having them visit," Lasher says. "But I looked at it as an opportunity to show them what we're doing."

Sierra Club members favor golf courses



RICK SCHAEFER

◀ **Tony Lasher, certified superintendent at The Resort at the Mountain, peers over the course's Wee Burn, a stream that provides habitat for coho salmon and steelhead trout.**

to keep to add to the course's rustic look. Other superintendents might remove the trees for aesthetic reasons.

Of course, Lasher told the members about the course's Wee Burn Restoration Project to restore and improve fish habitat on the course. The course teamed with several environmental groups and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on the eight-year project, completed last year.

The Wee Burn, Scottish for small stream, is a tributary of the Salmon River, designated in Oregon as a wild and scenic river by the Department of the Interior. The Wee Burn provides excellent habitat for coho salmon and steelhead trout.

But when the first nine holes of the course were built in the late 1920s, the Salmon River was channeled to prevent flooding. The preventive measure altered the stream's natural meander and blocked channels the fish used for spawning. The Wee Burn was not a suitable habitat for fish.

When Ed Hopper purchased The Resort at the Mountain in 1989, the Wee Burn restoration was high on his to-do list. Hopper hired Lasher in 1992 to over-

see the renovation. Lasher directed several elements of the project, including locating the stream's original pattern and rechanneling it. He also oversaw the construction of a fish ladder to aid the fish in their migration to spawning areas.

New fish access was also provided to one-third of a mile of the stream and to two acres of ponds that were previously inaccessible. Course workers planted thousands of native trees and shrubs to provide fish with protection and food sources.

After the tour, Lasher says a Sierra Club member from North Carolina asked him why more superintendents in the Tar Heel state weren't practicing environmentalism with the same fervor that Lasher does. It was a tough question that made Lasher contemplate the different demands superintendents face, depending on where their courses are located.

Lasher told the member there are superintendents all over the country who are doing sound environmental things. Lasher encouraged him to visit courses in his state.

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▼ **Stumps and brush are kept in place around pond edges at The Resort to provide havens for water wildlife.**

about as much as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals members fancy McDonald's. When Lasher took the group's members on the course, he overheard a man sarcastically say, "I can't believe I'm walking on a golf course fairway."

During the tour, a pack of deer scurried across the course. A club member remarked that she was surprised to see wildlife on a golf course.

But when they listened to Lasher explain his environmental policies, the club members realized they can't label *all* golf courses as environmental detriments. Lasher told them about his integrated pest management program and that he hasn't made a blanket herbicide application in many years. He showed them decayed trees damaged by beavers that he opted



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Lasher also explained to the member that many superintendents, including in North Carolina, are under pressure to have their courses in top shape. Golfers at The Resort don't mind patches of clover or dandelions on rough because they know Lasher and his crew practice IPM to keep chemical use to a minimum. But it might be a different story at another North Carolina facility, where golfers won't tolerate weeds.

"I'm lucky," Lasher says. "I'm in an area where I don't have that kind of pressure."

It bothers Lasher that old-school thinkers still believe golf is a culprit when it comes to environmentalism.

"But it feels good to be proactive," he says. "Some people think we're doing dastardly deeds here, but when we tell them and show them what we're doing, they do a 180."

Walkin', talkin' about nature

Cliff Beckmann never thought he'd lead nature walks in addition to tending turf when he chose golf course maintenance as a career. But that has been part of his gig as superintendent at Salishan for about three years.

The breathtaking scenery surrounding the golf course, located on a pastoral stretch near the Pacific Ocean, lends it-

▼ **Undisturbed sand dunes and their vegetation are an important of the terrain at Salishan.**

self to a nature walk. That's why the course, fully certified as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by Audubon International in 1994, cleared six miles of trails to offer guests a chance to see the habitat and its inhabitants — from bald eagles to beavers — up close. The 31-year-old Beckmann, who has been at Salishan for about five years, says the nature walks provide him an excellent opportunity to interact with the resort's guests.

"It's a great chance for the superintendent to tell people what we're doing to preserve the environment and to portray a positive image of the course," Beckmann says. "I don't think enough superintendents do that."

Beckmann conducts about four na-

▲ **Superintendent Cliff Beckmann stands at a trail leading to the Pacific Ocean. It's one of the trails on the Salishan property that Beckmann uses for his nature walks.**

ture walks a month, each lasting about two hours. Some of the environmental programs he touts include:

■ Returning areas of the course formerly in play to their natural state. When Beckmann came to Salishan almost five years ago, the resort maintained 82 of the property's 142 acres. Beckmann helped reduce it to 68 acres.

■ Conducting regular water quality testing of a creek on the course to ensure pesticides and fertilizers are not contaminating it. The creek runs into a nearby bay, which is a wildlife refuge. "We don't allow any fertilizer applications within 20 feet of waterways," Beckmann says.

■ Practicing an integrated pest management program that Beckmann has continually redefined. Beckmann and his staff of 17 use organic fertilizer on greens, and they administer only one herbicide application a year — a spot treatment.

Frequent rain in the Northwest — up to 80 inches a year — requires fungicide applications are more frequent to combat fusarium patch, which poses a problem from September through May. "Last year,

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we made eight fungicide applications on greens, and three were spot treatments," Beckmann says.

■ Trying to solve problems naturally. For instance, when Beckmann joined Salishan the course had a severe crow infestation problem. Crows are infamous for damaging turf to catch insects, such as



▲ This area was formerly maintained turf that was in play at Salishan. Several areas on the course have been returned to their natural state.

crane flies. To combat the growing crow population, Beckmann introduced three owls on the property. "Owls are natural predators of crows," he says, noting the crow population dwindled from several hundred to less than 50 in about four years.

■ Creating homes for wildlife. A few years ago, Beckmann and his crew created a pond on the par-3 sixth hole out of a ditch dug to gain soil used for mounding on other holes.

"When the ditch was dug, it was left barren," Beckmann says. "So we created a water feature that attracts a lot of wildlife. We improved the course's look and helped the environment at the same time."

Beckmann also allows most dead trees to stand on the course because they make homes for birds, including woodpeckers.

■ Maintaining a solid relationship with state agencies, including the Department of Fish and Wildlife. "[The agency] understands what we're trying to do — achieve a balance between maintaining a golf course and keeping it natural," Beckmann says.

In conjunction with the nature walks, Beckmann also compiled a book, *Your Tour Guide to the Plants of Salishan*, for guests to use on self-guided jaunts around the resort.

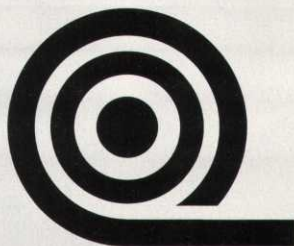
Beckmann says his biggest challenge is to improve the course aesthetically — but not at the expense of letting nature take its course.

"We have to fit in with the environment," Beckmann says. "That's why people come here — for the natural beauty." ■

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