

Repet after me: Playing golf is a game. Operating a golf course is a business.

By any standard of common sense, balance sheet analysis and tax revenue records, it becomes clear that golf is big business — about \$76 billion worth to the national economy. Here in Florida, it's worth about \$5 billion to the state's economy, and it employs 72,000 people. For an industry that contributes so much, there are a lot of restrictions, especially when it comes to water.

Water restrictions are an industry challenge. What other industry or business has been so severely and unfairly targeted to cut back a key resource?

Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association Past President Richard Staughton told me the state requested industries, municipalities and utilities to cut back water use 10 percent in light of the devastating drought this past year. Once the emergency drought order was lifted, the net effect was a 90 percent cutback for golf. And this totally outrageous treatment is being levied on a water-using industry that consumes only .85 percent of Georgia's water resources. Why is this happening?

It all goes back to the public perception that golf is a big water user. That isn't opinion; that's an unvarnished assertion coming from a water management district staff person. When asked why a 2.3 percent water user like golf in south Florida was being cut back 45 percent when the industry already was acknowledged as efficient water managers compared to most consumers, the response was, "But golf courses are so visible!" Say what? Visible doesn't mean irresponsible. If visibility is the criteria for holding golf to a tougher standard than everyone else, then I'll give you visibility.

Visible is the broken head gushing wasted gallons from municipal road medians. Visible is the homeowners association sprinkler system running during or after a rainstorm. Visible is the county commission's approval of a new water park during a drought. Visible is residential irrigation running on the wrong days and wrong times of day during drought restrictions. Visible is the newspaper article stating that the

Perception Becomes Regulatory Reality

BY JOEL JACKSON



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local wastewater treatment plant is dumping 300 million gallons of "lightly treated" effluent into the Atlantic ocean every day.

The biggest water wasters, due to their overwhelming numbers and ignorance of proper turf and landscape management, are homeowners. In Florida, public supply consumes 30 percent of the area's water, and 50 percent of that is used on outdoor irrigation. So how can government effectively enforce water restrictions on the general population? It can't. So politicians focus on "visible" industries like golf, which people love to attack on a number of fronts.

All I ask is that the people responsible for regulation of water use publish a pie chart showing the major water-user groups in the newspapers. They don't have to pat anyone on the back or point any fingers, just label the water-user groups: agriculture, public supply, industry and commercial, power generation, recreation and private self supply (private well). In Florida, golf is approximately two-thirds of the recreation total. The numbers will speak for themselves.

Another number I learned recently was that a typical golf course recharges the surficial water table to the tune of about four times more water than it pumps to irrigate. In an urban setting, I would think that would be a great positive contribution to water conservation.

Certainly during emergency drought conditions, every water user, including golf courses, must practice good water management to contribute to conservation. Forcing golf to cut back by disproportionate amounts does not save significant amounts of water. It only jeopardizes the businesses and local economies we're trying to protect.

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.