

A Pointed Threat

Sharp Park Golf Course supports about 60,000 rounds a year. It was designed by Alister MacKenzie and sits about 60 feet from the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean.

Green fees at the course top out at \$24 for residents of all shapes and sizes. The place hauls in \$1 million annually in food and beverage and is home turf for two high-school boys' and girls' teams. For good measure, the course became one of only a handful of authentically organic golf courses in the country this past June.

Yet, according to a few loud and influential environmentalists who want to make it a nature reserve for two endangered species, Sharp Park must close for "the good of the game."

Yep, they really said that, and also claim it's a money loser. Another faction of soccer lovers has joined the fray and suggested the course needs to close because it's only a game for white men, even though a visit to Sharp Park will reveal folks of all races, age groups and genders.

Add it all up, and this is why it's easy to suggest the epicenter of golf vs. extremist environmentalism has found its heart in San Francisco.

Some may find it easy to shrug off a bizarre saga where environmentalists are waging a battle to shut down a popular and historic municipal golf course. After all, it's the wacky city by the bay. Most of America has trouble taking interest in a political battle with too many factions to list, especially one playing out in a loopy city where a board supervisor once infamously murdered another supervisor.

I recently documented the battle over

IF SHARP PARK CLOSES ON AN ABSURD CLAIM THAT SPECIES CAN'T CO-EXIST WITH GOLFERS, ALL BETS ARE OFF WHEN IT COMES TO FUTURE WARNINGS AGAINST GOLF COURSES

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



Sharp Park for Golf World magazine in a 2,100-word story that could have been a book's length. And maybe this sad tale will someday find its way between hard covers, because I can't imagine a more critical juncture for golf's future. If Sharp Park closes on an absurd claim that species can't co-exist with golfers, all bets are off when it comes to future threats against golf courses.

The group taking on Sharp Park's existence is a rogue outfit called the Center for Biological Diversity. It subscribes to a "deep ecology" position which says humans have no right to reduce "the richness and diversity" of other life forms except to "satisfy vital needs." Anything they deem beyond vital and harming wildlife — golf is near the top of its list — invites the threat of legal action. The group has a long list of developments stopped in the name of protecting endangered species to prove it can and will fight.

Sharp Park is the group's first crack at an existing golf course, even though there are many local environmentalists who sensibly see an opportunity to show how this gem of a course can become a model for golf and environmental co-existence. These environ-

mentalists were almost apologetic for the group's tactics. Those environmentalists were almost apologetic for the center's tactics and understand how the rogue tactics will only further the divide between understandably annoyed golfers and doing what is sensible for both the species and our beloved game.

The golfers, initially caught off guard by the center's tactics and obstinate toward any suggestion to save the species, are now on the same page and have begun to make a case for Sharp's future. But they need the golf industry to help — not only in continuing efforts to better protect wildlife and make golf courses the stewards of the environment they can be, but to support the effort to restore Sharp Park as an affordable MacKenzie gem that sustains two beautiful endangered species.

So as October's President's Cup descends on nearby San Francisco muni Harding Park, keep Sharp Park in your thoughts. It's No. 1 on golf's endangered courses list. For no good reason.

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