

Yes, turf is on trial. For the past few years, environmental activists have been prosecuting turfgrass and fertilizers in the press and at county commission meetings. The

attacks began with phosphorous bans in states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin and a rash of local fertilizer ordinances in Florida. The attacks include statements such as the one made by the Florida Sierra Club's Stuart DeCew. "Worldwide, there is mounting evidence that links coastal pollution, specifically from fertilizers, to increases and intensity of harmful algal blooms," he said.

The media often is a willing accomplice in the demonization of turfgrass. For example, in a recent *Orlando Sentinel* editorial, columnist Mike Thomas used the inflammatory term "water-gulping grass" and boldly stated, "Big Grass is worse than Big Oil." It's just one example of how the media's credibility has been lost in this world of "be first" sensationalism.

Activists might offer up water quality studies of nutrient levels, but they never really document the sources of the total nitrogen and phosphorous. Terril Nell, Ph.D. of the University of Florida testified at a Florida Senate Committee hearing last March on a proposed statewide model fertilizer ordinance. Citing the ongoing Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study, Nell said that early results indicate fertilizers contribute about 3 percent to the nutrient loading, much less than what he said sewer treatment plants and even dog waste contribute (about 20 percent and 15 percent, respectively).

In Florida, responding to those attacking fertilizer use and promoting use bans, Dr. George Hochmuth authored a document titled "Urban Water Quality and Fertilizer Ordinances: Avoiding Unintended Consequences: A Review of the Scientific Literature." The review documented more than 140 studies performed by land grant universities nationwide. The review showed that properly applied nutrients pose no significant risk to the environment. Activists dismissed the study

Witness for the Defense

BY JOEL JACKSON



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as data bought and paid for by industry, when, in reality, the most recent data being compiled in Florida on the fate of fertilizers is being funded by an EPA grant.

When the state of Florida brought together a group of regulatory, scientific, industry, political and activist stakeholders and held public meetings about fertilizer use, the Sierra Club eventually withdrew, saying it just could not believe the science.

Our best hope is to inform and arm our politicians with proven facts about the environmental, economic and sociological benefits of turf in all its forms.

We don't need to be on the witness stand to testify to turf's benefits. We should be sharing the evidence regularly as part of an annual program. Each chapter across the country must have an Advocacy Week or Month in which chapter members promote the GCSAA's and the Environmental Institute for Golf's sustainability message (people, planet, profit) with the public.

Also, chapter members can easily find a list of "The Benefits of Turfgrass" on the web and deliver it to state and local politicians, environmental agencies and the media.

If we don't become more aggressive about presenting accurate information about our industry, misinformation from activists will fill the void. We have a good story to tell, but we must speak up to be heard.

We can start by sharing turf's benefits with golfers and club leaders. Then we can take our message on the road. We can show everyone that turf really does benefit the environment, that we are in fact "not guilty."

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is Executive Director of the Florida GCSA.