

Good news! By sharing science and common sense with local, state and regional regulators, the golf industry is finally beginning to change common misperceptions about the game.

We've spoken out on well-known cases such as The Cape Cod Study; the phosphorus issue in Wisconsin and Minnesota; water conservation programs in the Southwest and Georgia; and BMPs, fertilizer and water quality issues in the East and West.

Hot-button regulatory issues impact how we conduct business, so they often take center stage. Our other efforts, such as school and member eco-tours, annual bird counts and our collaboration with schools on butterfly gardens, get less press coverage. We need to broadcast these efforts more to city and county regulators and the Media.

Along those lines, the We Are Golf coalition of golf associations has brought national attention to the positive impacts the golf industry continues to make. What's more, those efforts are beginning to trickle down to individual states. A number of state "Golf Days" are being proclaimed across the country. And they are successfully informing people nationwide about our industry, the good it does, and its economic and environmental realities.

As part of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association's annual tour of Florida's agriculture commodities, the Florida GCSA participated in its 12th Spring Regulator Tour. The Old Collier Golf Club has been the first stop on the tour for more than a decade. So, regulators from EPA; Florida's DEP and Dept. of Agriculture; Florida's Water Management Districts; and some county regulators have the opportunity to see the golf course and maintenance area.

Few of them have ever set foot on a golf course, so it's an eye-opener for most of them. While Old Collier is a premiere facility, the principles and facilities are common to all operations. By discussing actual acreages and pesticide programs, and showing the relationships between playing a game and running a business, we make a stronger impression on regulators each year.

Closing the Gap

BY JOEL JACKSON



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Just one or two zero-tolerance folks still refuse to believe what they are hearing and seeing. It's puzzling, given the wildlife inventory they see on the tour. We've even witnessed a couple of bald eagles fighting with ospreys over fish in mid-air. Great stuff!

Our host, Tim Hiers, CGCS, also gives fifth graders from a nearby school a golf cart tour of the course, educating them about what we in the golf course maintenance industry really do.

We need to encourage more of these kinds of activities and prepare handouts of economic and environmental facts, including revenue, jobs, charitable giving, wildlife inventories and golf water use. We need to share such handouts not only on these tours, but also with members at our clubs.

Unfortunately, politicians often don't respect scientific facts in rule making. Commission meetings are sometimes dominated by emotional appeals and rhetoric by agenda-driven activists. So the more we can show people what valuable economic and environmental assets golf courses really are, the easier it will be to defend the turfgrass industry against attacks.

Nothing warms my heart more than the story of the skeptical environmentalist who reluctantly attended one of this year's annual Audubon Christmas bird counts. She just knew she was in for a wasted day in a lifeless, barren, chemical-filled wasteland. Until, that is, she and the others on the count spotted a grand total of 46 species and 438 birds. They even had a bonus sighting of a bobcat resting in the shade in the rough. The tour organizer said the lady's attitude did a full 180-degree turn by the end of the event.

Case — I mean gap — closed.

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