

THE STEWARD CONFERENCE: *Count Us In!*

By Bill Roberts

March 28, 1987 marked the occurrence of the first meeting of a seemingly diverse group of organizations from throughout Wisconsin who, in the longer perspective, actually represent a common theme. As stated in the conference theme, this mutual view concerns the "re-investing in our Land—Based Economy and Natural Resources". Adopting the acronym "STEWARD Conference", (Silviculture, Tourism, Environment, Wildlife, Agriculture, Recreation and Development) this gathering was sponsored by the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, the Wisconsin Farm Bureau, the Wisconsin Towns Association, the Wisconsin Land Conservation Association and the Wisconsin Tourism Federation.

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association was in attendance and will continue to provide input as a legislative agenda is developed. Among the concerns enumerated by the Wisconsin GCSA and referred to by speakers and discussion panel members throughout the day were:

- A) a need for support for agricultural and horticulture extension activities through the university system,
- B) a need for a coherent and consistent land use planning policy including a clear consensus on how to develop and manage "marginal" lands,
- C) a need to define accountability in terms of groundwater protection and in terms of maintaining ground water integrity,
- D) a need to define the same accountabilities in terms of surface waters of the State,
- E) the need to develop an emphasis on Integrated Pest Management,
- F) the need to provide economic incentives which will allow for development of alternate land uses (this could include recreational facilities such as golf courses),
- G) the need to recognize that economic development and the "quality of life" in Wisconsin are in-

evitably linked and that factors such as recreation (again including golf courses) are a part of that "quality of life",

- H) a need to enhance requirements in the area of pesticide use in order that "economic thresholds" are recognized and that the judicious use of pesticides by professionals, such as Golf Course Superintendents, is accepted as an essential management tool.

These items are, of course, only a few of the areas of concern to the long-term development of recreation/alternate land use planning and resource management which can, in fact, impact the growth of golf in Wisconsin.

Several speakers at the STEWARD Conference, while addressing the overall needs of resource preservation and enhancement, alluded to themes appropriate to Golf Course Superintendents specifically.

Howard Richards, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, addressed the need to resolve the dilemma of public funding versus private funding on issues which are really not mutually exclusive such as ground water protection. Further, Secretary Richards defined the need to develop "skillful managers", who when utilizing capital and resources, can see the long-term effects of decisions including the ramifications regarding the "human resource".

Further that, as is happening in the arena of golf course management, current investments in technology will lead to better and safer techniques. Also, a major thrust in Wisconsin in the future will include "sustainable agriculture". The adaptability of techniques used in golf course management (perennial crop) may be of use in this research. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and the United States Golf Association currently sponsor research dealing with breeding techniques, heat, cold and drought stress tolerance mechanisms, disease

and insect resistance that could, in fact, provide a degree of background as we search for plant varieties that require "low input, profitable techniques and protection of the environment". The point is, the knowledge and expertise, may be exchangeable.

Buzz Besadny, Secretary, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, in noting that "a healthy environment supports a healthy economy", stressed that the health of both is, in fact, tied to a "partnership" of all interested parties that will be, inevitably, the only way to be effective in protecting our resources.

This remark included a four point perspective that the DNR has viewed as a positive framework for dealing with the future integrity of resource management. These points include:

- A) the need to maintain a long range perspective which can be difficult in an environment that is tied to "annual budgets, short-term politics and elections",
- B) the need to think "preventive" rather than "reactive" and that "education is preventive and cheaper than treatment",
- C) the need to improve inter-agency interaction and cooperation through increased communication and the promotion of the concept of shared responsibility towards resources,
- D) the need to increase cooperation with the private sector to, again, promote shared responsibility. This effort will mean increased efforts in the area of public relations.

As noted, numerous specific issues were noted throughout the day by speakers and participants, and, while all of these items will have to be synthesized into a coherent agenda, it must be emphasized that a major step has been taken in addressing the needs of the future. The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association will be a part of that future and can look forward to helping to shape that destiny.