



RANKINGS AND AWARDS, ODDS AND ENDS

By Monroe S. Miller

Lest anyone start feeling "guilty" about our aggressive position defense in the AG 29 hearings, a stance led by Red Roskopf, Terry Kurth, et. al., read this bit of news and relax: Wisconsin rates in the top five states on environmental issues.

The survey by Renew America, a private environmental and conservation organization, tied Massachusetts and Wisconsin for fourth in the rankings behind California, Oregon and Minnesota. Tennessee and Louisiana were at the bottom.

I like to have this kind of evidence at hand when some screaming zealot wants to ban all golf courses and golf course pesticides because they are "ruining" the state's environment.

Since I'm on the subject of rankings, both of our city newspapers had articles on March 24 with headlines "WISCONSIN TAX BILL TOPS LIST" and "WISCONSIN TAX LOAD HIGHEST IN THE NATION." What a claim to fame. If most of us were to choose something we didn't want to be "first" in, it would be the taxes we pay. Certainly it gives reason to hold some of the boneheads we elect to the state senate and state assembly accountable, accountable to explain and defend why we have to continually read results like these.

Or they can explain why the headline two days later, on March 26, read "BUDGET CUTS UW AG COLLEGE STAFF," despite our first place finish as taxpayers. Those ag staff cuts hurt **US**, you and me in the golf course management business.

We seem to have money for scores of hairbrain schemes and social programs (I won't start on welfare, I promise), but we cannot afford to replace a retirement in the Horticulture Department to help the huge Wisconsin potato industry. The scary thing is that it could have been a turfgrass faculty position.

I feel for Dr. Leo Walsh. As the CALS dean, he has the unpleasant task of facing commodity groups like ours that

are furious because retired extension faculty or research positions aren't filled. He calls it "gut-wrenching" and said "it's like asking yourself whether you'd rather lose your right arm or your left arm."

Hopefully, front page (Sunday paper even) stories like this will help move bureaucrats, administrators and legislators to finding solutions to these problems.

It seems we have some responsibilities here, too. The first is to write to your state senator and your state assemblyman — most of them can read — and express your outrage. The second is to VOTE. When the time comes, if support from your representative isn't forthcoming, vote the bum out of office. Finally, let's redouble our efforts to get the NOER CENTER on line even **before** our plans call for it. The presence of this facility will help our cause a lot.

This state can afford to fill funding in where the federal government has fallen away. Or the feds could solve these problems by building a couple fewer Stealth bombers (at \$500 million a copy).

Oh, by the way, we have finished first in another area: Wisconsin has the nation's highest gas tax.

Well, he's done it again. *GRASS ROOTS* author (and *Capital Times* sports writer) Rob Schultz has again been chosen as a finalist in a writing category in the Associated Press Sports Editors contest.

Last year he won recognition for his great story on the Packers' victory in the Ice Bowl. His 1988 entry is a golf story. He wrote about Jamie Hutton, a Monona youngster suffering from leukemia, and his relationship with pro golfer Greg Norman. Norman befriended the youth last year at the Heritage Classic at Hilton Head, South Carolina.

I know a good story when I read one, and Rob wrote a great one. I hope he wins the top award; he deserves it.

Congratulations from all of us.

In recent years I've tried to attend the University of Massachusetts Turfgrass Conference held late each winter. I like their format a lot — plenty of time is given to speakers so they may develop a topic. The roster of speakers is usually excellent and the four days given to education puts forth enough information to digest until our own Symposium in the fall.

I find it valuable for other reasons as well. It really seems to be a regional meeting and addresses problems throughout the northeast. And their problems and management challenges seem to precede ours by a season or two.

For example, drought conditions arrived there several years ago and the golf course superintendents in the northeast have done well in securing a fair share of that precious resource — water. They seem to have to learn to deal with pests before we do, pests like the gypsy moth and the BTA beetle.

They also experience some of the same tough regulatory standards we do, and that gives me a clue to what will probably be facing us in Wisconsin.

For the past couple of years, the northeast has been bothered by what is becoming a terribly serious pest — the insect pear thrips. The target or host of these tiny winged insects is the sugar maple, Wisconsin's state tree.

These insects hibernate in the soil in the winter and climb into maple buds during the spring days of April. They feed on the bud tissue, causing the tree to produce tattered and shriveled leaves.

I first read about the problem last year, although I believe it was present before that. The damage from last year has prompted many maple producers to cut back on tapping. There is also worry about timber and firewood industries along with the lucrative fall foliage tourist season. And we can be certain such damage will be felt on their golf courses, as well.

Last year, pear thrips (obviously they are hosted by trees other than pears)

defoliated 469,000 acres in Vermont, 1-2 million acres in Pennsylvania and additional acres in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York and New Hampshire.

Researchers there are trying to develop both short- and long-term solutions for fighting the insect, which only recently has become the subject of serious scientific study. Some of them are going to travel to Europe to find out how pear thrips is controlled there. The hope is that information will help in developing combat plans here in the U.S. and Canada. So serious is the study that states are allowing spray testing to see if insecticides will be effective in keeping this insect's numbers under control.

Someday I'll remember to ask either Chuck Koval, Phil Pellitteri or Julie Nara about the chances of pear thrips moving west toward Wisconsin. We don't need this problem.

It was just a year ago when Bill Bengeyfield made the long trip (by car) from his golf season headquarters in Frankfort, Michigan to the Pine Hills Country Club in Sheboygan. He spoke to us about turfgrass research in general and the USGA research venture specifically. Well, this year the USGA will distribute \$660,300 in grants, an all-time high. In fact, it represents an increase of \$190,000 over 1988's total. The support is going to 19 projects underway at various institutions around the country. The USGA Turfgrass Information File program, headed by Peter Cookingham, is also receiving funding from the USGA.

If you include the 1989 monies, almost \$3 million in grants has been awarded to develop new turfgrasses and management techniques to reduce golf course maintenance costs. This is an impressive achievement and much credit for its success belongs to Bill Bengeyfield.

If you haven't already, take a look in the February 1989 issue of *Grounds Maintenance*. This respected journal named Mr. Bengeyfield recipient of their fourth annual **Turf Master Award**. It's an extremely well written and accurate piece about him. Congratulations, Bill!

Will golf course superintendents ever cease talking about the weather? Not likely since our lives and our success is so closely tied to it. So here is the latest from Douglas Clark, associate professor of meteorology and soil

science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He's optimistic and said, "I'm pretty confident we won't have a spring drought like we did in 1988." "It is unusual to get two years of severe drought basically in the same area, and typically you won't see it happen," adds Carroll Spencer, state statistician in the Department of Agriculture.

I hope they're both right. March, in Madison at least, ended well below normal in participation. The deficit leaves a lot of catching up to do in April, as this is written.

Most of us won't forget the dry spring of 1988, a year Wisconsin had an average of 25.7 inches of precipitation. That was above the record low of 21 inches in 1976 and well below the average of 31 inches. The all-time record amount of rainfall, curiously, came in 1938, the year after the "dust bowl" drought.

That 1976 drop in precipitation was followed by 10 years — 1977 to 1987 — when nearly every year had normal or well above normal precipitation.

Despite his feeling that we'll have a moist spring, Clark is standing by his long-range forecast that may see summer return to droughty conditions. Beyond that, he sees the outlook for precipitation in 1990 on the downside, too.

When discussions about prolonged dry spells crop up, we are talking about unprecedented natural occurrences. For example, the last time Wisconsin saw even two severe droughts back-to-back was during the Civil War years of 1863-1864. That may be why I'm so frightened at the thought of a 1988-1989-1990 drought period.

I'm just not ready for palm trees in Wisconsin; they seem a poor substitute for oak, hickory and maple.

We know golf is in a boom time now — new courses are being built while old courses are being updated and remodeled. Many individual nagging problems are being solved. Courses are busy; waiting lists at golf clubs are growing.

Well, the prosperity extends to manufacturers too. And we are lucky in Wisconsin to have many of them. Ransomes Sims and Jeffries of Johnson Creek, manufacturers of commercial and turfgrass mowing equipment, had a banner year in 1988. Their sales exceeded \$160 million, a 25 percent increase over 1987 sales and the sixth consecutive year of record sales and profit growth.

Congratulations to Helmut Adam and his excellent staff.

WORTH REPEATING: From Dr. James B. Beard on March 8, 1989: "There is a trend toward modifying the USGA system (of putting green construction), such as using 100 percent sand rather than a mix because it is easier and cheaper. The USGA system remains the preferred approach."

And as Jim Latham has said innumerable times, "there isn't such a thing as a 'modified' USGA specification putting green."

These quotations are in line with Dr. Kussow's remarks on USGA putting green construction (coarse sand layer)

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in the last issue of the *GRASS ROOTS*. All are evidence ("ammunition") that can be used in negotiations with architects, owners, builders or members who propose otherwise.

MOST INTERESTING RESEARCH DATA FROM THE WINTER TURF CONFERENCES: From Dr. Don White's excellent work on *Poa annua* at the University of Minnesota (which is being funded in part by the USGA Green Section) comes some information on how dynamic the population shift is on *Poa annua*/bentgrass greens. This data is part of his study of the ecology of annual bluegrass/bentgrass communities on putting greens. He has developed truly ingenious ways to return to the same exact community so an accurate plant count can be made throughout the season.

Each week he evaluates the vigor of specific plants, as well. He's noticed, for example, that during periods of seeding or some other physiological stress, the annual and biennial types are lost.

But back to the data. Below are percentages of *Poa annua*/bentgrass on a primarily *Poa* green during the season (I assume 1988) in Minneapolis:

Date	Percent <i>Poa annua</i>	Percent Bentgrass
May 2	90	10
June 13	78	22
August 1	36	64
August 15	24	76
October 3	60	40
October 25	90	10

The changes are dramatic and although many of us may have had suspicions of such activity, I'll bet few had any idea of its extreme. It seems to me that when you tell someone what per-

cent *Poa annua* your greens are, the answer should be qualified with a calendar date.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER? Given my impression that most golf course superintendents are, for the most part, happy with their profession, I wonder how our poll results would compare with the Gallup Organization's results when they asked a statistical sample of the adult population, "If you could start your working life over again, would you pick the same profession?"

The results were surprising to me. Forty-seven percent said they would pick a different one, 36 percent said they would choose the same and the rest said they weren't sure.

I say surprising because I can still hardly wait to get to work each morning. How about you?

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