



It Was A Tough Year For Golf Course Superintendents

By Monroe S. Miller

I received a short note from a colleague—you all know him—in mid-September that could have been written by any of us. It went like this

Monroe -
The course is rebounding nicely, and so am I.

Regards,

XXXXXXXX

He had me a little worried during the summer. Things weren't going that well for anyone, including him, only he wasn't used to it. But he found himself and his inner resolve in late August and the turnaround his words reflect shows how important that attribute can be.

As tough as it was, this was a summer that took a lot of resolve, an upbeat attitude and some faith that the worst weather would eventually end.

It was the hottest June/July/August period—meteorological summer—on record. You'll be telling your kids and grandkids and your young summer employees about 1995 for years and years to come. In our town, the hottest summer meant a three month temperature average (based on the daily high-low readings) that was 74.6, easily best the previous mark of 74.0 degrees, set in 1901. Record keeping started in 1869. A "normal" summer sees a temperature average of 68.6 degrees.

For golf course superintendents, the temperatures were only part of the misery. The oppressive, almost overwhelming humidity meant there were plant diseases in full bloom somewhere on the course almost continually. The humidity made the 90-100 degrees feel 20 degrees warmer.

We had 27 days with a temperature above 90 degrees, broke three

daily high records (6/23, 8/12 and 8/13) and one highest low ever recorded on 7/14!

Rainfall was spotty, not only around the state but from one side of town to the other. I was crying for rainfall while other superintendents in the city were cursing the excess. It seemed the southeast part of the state received the worst of the torrential downpours.

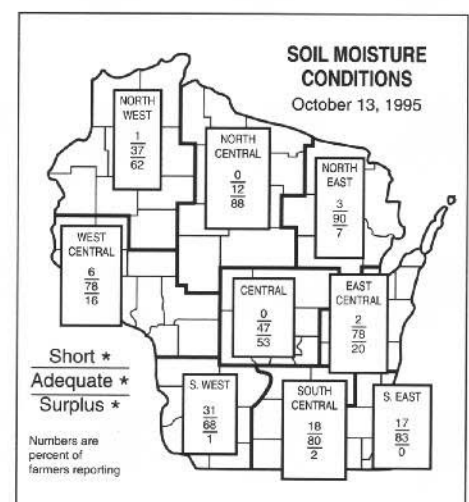
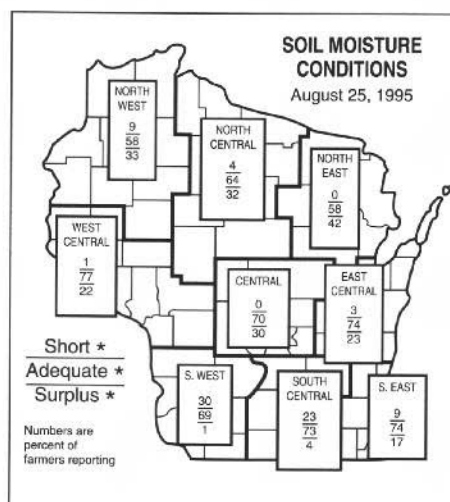
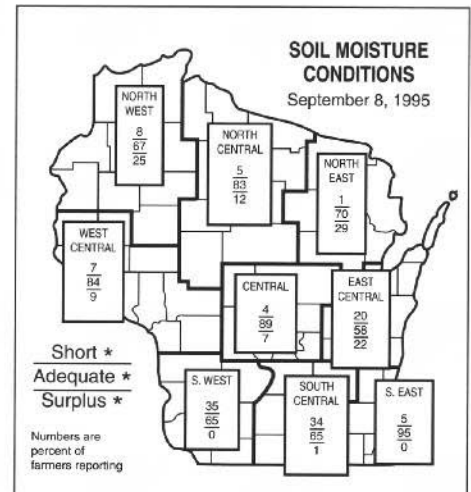
Of course, the brutal summer followed a cold, wet spring and, by the third week of September, wet weather brought a temporary halt of the aerifying and overseeding going on all over Wisconsin. In fact, some parts of northwest Wisconsin had snow on September 21st! How much do you love this Wisconsin weather?

So we are back at it, a favorite Wisconsin past time, particularly among people like farmers and golf course superintendents—whining about the weather. In May—will we ever have summer? In July—too dry. In August—too hot and too humid. In September—too wet and cold. Two months after that—too much (or too little) snow. And no one to blame!

The soil moisture conditions reports are here for your edification.

Regardless of your position on the issue, on August 21 the office of Public Intervenor was closed. A report in the *Wisconsin State Journal* said Tom Dawson, an occasional speaker on the WGCSA podium, and Kathleen Falk closed the office and took vacation before assuming their new jobs as assistant attorneys general in the Justice Department.

The PI office was downsized in Governor Thompson's budget and moved into the DNR effective September 1st. It is now an answering machine. The message says, in part, that the office was "abolished as part



of the governor's budget." It goes on to suggest people who have environmental problems call Tommy at home!

Would that be 'sour grapes'?

Sometime this fall the DNR will go through the civil service procedures to hire someone to fill the redefined PI position. The new position doesn't have the power to litigate and will be governed by an eight-member policy board.

If you think you are getting more heavy downpours of rain of late, you are probably right. A recent study shows the U.S. is getting more of its total rain in heavy downpours than early in the century. There is scientific speculation that this is a sign of global warming from greenhouse gases. Here we go again!

Simulations of warming from those gases have been developed on computers. These models predict such downpours, according to research. The trend shows a rise in rainfall throughout the year but is strongest in the summer. The area is roughly defined by a boundary of Montana, Maine, North Carolina and Texas. Obviously the Badger State is included.

For the country as a whole, the fraction of total summertime rainfall that has come in heavy downpours has risen by 2 percent to 3 percent since 1900. In practical terms, this translates to an average of about one additional heavy rainfall every two years on your golf course.

This is either one more thing to worry about, or to forget. You choose. I choose to forget it.

At the end of last issue's **SOYLENT GREEN**, Steve Millett offered this "point to ponder..." "why doesn't a world class turf program have a natural turfgrass playing surface for their football team? What are your thoughts about this topic?"

Tom Harrison and I have some personal experience with natural turf on the Camp Randall field.

The field was natural grass (and weeds and bare soil) in the mid-1960s when we were working for Pete Miller at the Nakoma Golf Club. Whenever those who were responsible for the field needed help, they would call faithful alumnus Pete. He'd go over, give advice and occasionally offer

help. I pulled the John Bean sprayer with an IH 240 tractor once to spray the field with fungicide.

Most of the time the natural turf field wasn't in very good shape. I doubt those in charge knew much about it and as I recall they would also seek help from professors Love and Newman.

Air movement was lacking in the closed-in field, it was used for other activities and sports, practice took place there at times, and bad weather games were disastrous. Artificial turf makes sense in some circumstances, and this field is such a circumstance.

I have walked on the new turf—it is only a couple of years old—and it seems to me to be safer than the one it replaced. Only the players know whether it is better or worse than natural turf. The question, then and now, remains "what kind of condition would a natural field be in during the football season?"

The answer is pretty easy.

On the way home from our leaf peekers trip, Cheryl and I drove down to Greensburg, Pennsylvania so we could see an exhibition at the Westmoreland Museum there. It was a display you would have enjoyed.

The museum curators assembled trophies and memorabilia from Arnold Palmer's singular and legendary career. Mr. Palmer grew up in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, less than ten miles east of Greensburg. In fact, our first stop was at Latrobe CC so Cheryl could see what she has heard me talk about.

The Westmoreland is a beautiful museum, especially for a relatively small town. The exhibition of Palmer prizes was world class. Many of the trophies are permanent trophies—the Masters, for example—and were loaned to the museum for the four week show. For the first time in the history of golf, the U.S. Open Trophy, the U.S. Amateur Trophy, the British Open Trophy and the revered Masters Trophy were all under the same roof, in the same room. For me it was a wonderful experience.

The folks in western Pennsylvania chose an excellent way to honor a favorite son. Make no mistake—the trophies, photos, paintings and other memorabilia most certainly are works of art. So is Arnie.

Finally, a picture from our autumn vacation that you might enjoy. We stayed at the Mt. Washington Hotel in the White Mountains of New Hampshire for one night. It is a grand place in a beautiful spot, reminiscent of a time past. The hotel is surrounded by a Donald Ross golf course, and the picture shows the practice putting green just to the front of the hotel. It wraps around many large granite boulders which are bedded in bark and dressed up with flowers. How would you like to teach a new employee how to hand mow a green like this one?

Relax, enjoy the upcoming holidays and take generous time off to recover and recharge your batteries. You have earned some serious personal and family time. Noel. 🍷

