

# Looking For Balance

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

We are one day past the summer solstice as I write this, and it is really dry. Reports tell me that is true in a few other places in Wisconsin as well. We've had an inch of rain in the past five weeks and we are five inches below normal for the year. That's on top of a dry year last year that ended with a moisture deficit. But the reality is that another spring is past us and summer is here, for real. Likely July 4th will have come and gone by the time this journal reaches your desk.

Despite the dry conditions, the temperatures have been moderate. It was slow to warm up, but once it did the scars from winter healed quickly most places. And it is not exactly a new observation that most frequently turf conditions are better under drier conditions than under humid or wet circumstances. And plant diseases are for sure less of a problem in drier weather. All that is required is a good irrigation system.

Although individual days, especially those fraught with problems are stress, can seemingly last forever, once we round the July 4th corner Field Day comes quickly, followed shortly by Labor Day and a new school year.

This is my 31st year as a golf course superintendent, and each day as I cross the tracks from the shop yard to the golf course, I am filled with a sense of wonder. The course still looks bright and fresh, although that will diminish as late summer comes.

Why, after so much time, is there still that awe? Is it the thrill of watching Baltimore Orioles and bluebirds each day? Or the bright green, thick, close cut turfgrass,

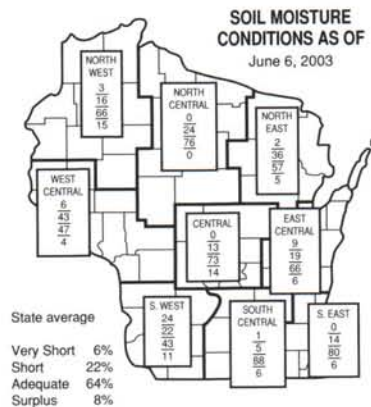
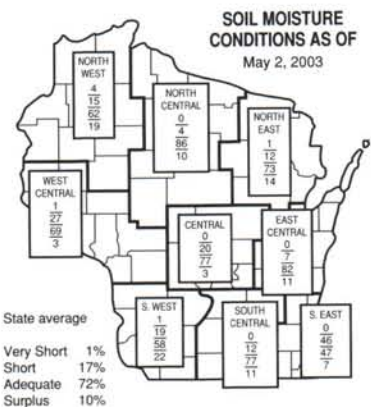
framed by oak tress nearly 200 years old? Maybe I am still enthralled with Lake Mendota, deep blue many mornings in early summer.

It is all of those things, of course. I am convinced this wonderment with nature is instinct in some - maybe most - of us. To have found such a rich profession so many years ago fills me with gratitude and humility.

So it is steady as you go for the remaining days of summer. I hope the breaks all come our way and that we can, in this year of financial pressures, declare it "our best ever."

For your records, soil moisture status from around the state is reported here, thanks to the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service.

Few would have any idea of the time I spend on deciding on a quote



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to use on the inside of the front cover for each issue of *The Grass Roots*. It is also an extremely pleasant exercise and has led me through some great reading as a result.

This issue offers words from G.A. Farley. If you have read "Keepers of the Green" you know about her. Gertrude Farley wrote a great little book in 1931 entitled "Golf Course Common Sense." Scott Schaller inherited a mint condition copy from his grandfather and he allowed me to read it.

Ms. Farley was a secretary to the green committee chairman at a Cleveland area country club and in 1921 she and this gentleman established a regional USGA Green Section. They drew up a cooperative buying program that was popular with area golf courses. In 1923 their success necessitated a formal office.

Ms. Farley gave support to the formation of the Cleveland District Greenkeepers Association that year, which led to a position with the National Association of Greenkeepers of America. She held that job until 1927.

End of history lesson.

Most WGCSA members will quickly recall the excellent work and service Dr. Doug Maxwell provided to Wisconsin turfgrass managers. We were but a small piece of his rich and varied career.

As evidence of his widespread projects, the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development presented him their Chair's Award for Scientific Excellence.

This award recognizes an individual researcher or research team for a significant achievement originating from the U.S. Agency for International Development's Collaborative Research Support Program. It highlights work toward sustainable, environmentally friendly increases in food security and economic growth.

Dr. Maxwell's research overseas has helped farmers manage vegetable crop diseases in developing countries. He collaborated with scientists in the Caribbean, South America, Central America and the Middle East. Twenty-nine scientists have studied in his lab and largely as a result of that, new plant disease labs in many countries were established.

Of course we remember him for getting the TDDL underway for us and filling in at the turf pathology position until Dr. Jung was hired.

Congratulations!

Early in spring this year, Reinders held their biennial turf conference. It was widely reported on and

attended in person by many, so we passed on duplicate reporting. But for our historical records, we share a few pictures from the 2003 show. And thanks to Reinders for an educational and enjoyable event.

A bill was introduced in the Wisconsin legislature last May that WGCSA members can support. The bill would designate the first full weekend in March each year "Aldo Leopold weekend."

Leopold, who lived from 1887 to 1948, was a renowned scientist and conservationist and is widely considered the father of wildlife ecology. He served on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin - Madison.

"A Sand County Almanac" was



**Professor Joe Vargas has lectured at all Reinders Conferences.**



**Maple Bluff's Tom Harrison and Midwest Irrigation's Ken Holthaus and Jim Beaves.**



Good friends all—Mark Kienert, Rod Johnson, Pat Sisk, Dave Smith, Dave Brandenburg, Wayne Otto and Golfdom editor Pat Jones.



Again this year the show floor was very busy.



Wayne Horman talked about Scotts RRCB.

written by Leopold and sets the stage for many of his philosophical positions on conservation. It also introduces readers to "the shack," a small chicken coop where he went with family and graduate students on weekends to absorb nature from up close. It is a wonderful book.

The early 70s was a disappointing time to manage a golf course if that course had a lot of American elm

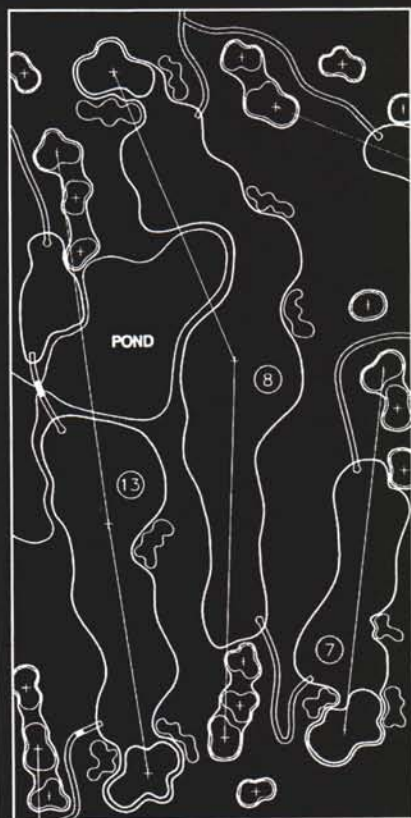
trees. Ours did, and for several years the biggest job each summer was removing elms infected with Dutch elm disease. Eventually we had only a few left, but they lived on since most of the host trees in the city were gone.

The dry weather of the last couple of years put stress on a lot of trees, including four of our remaining elms. It was sad to see them flagging high in their crowns late last year, and it was even sadder to cut them down this spring.

Dr. Steve Millett will be leaving the state this summer. His talented wife Debbie has accepted a major position with radio station KMOX in St. Louis (home of Bob Costas and Jack Buck) and will host her own morning radio show. With 50,000 watts of power, it will be possible to hear her occasionally in Wisconsin. She was recently Gov. McCallum's press secretary and has hosted radio shows in Madison, Columbus and in Missouri as well. Congratulations to this great couple.

I cannot recall ever meeting a golf course superintendent who wasn't interested in the weather. Weather has great influence on our careers, and some days it controls almost totally what we do on the course. It would be difficult not being curious about the weather, given those circumstances. DTN, website weather, the Weather Channel and who knows how many other weather sources are known to course managers.

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Given that, I have a book to recommend: "Wisconsin's Weather and Climate." Written by Edward Hopkins of the UW - Madison's Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, and Joseph Moran, chairman of the Department of Earth Sciences at the UW - Green Bay, the book is full of information about the Wisconsin weather that both frustrates and rewards us so much.

Some examples will illustrate why this book should be in your library. From recent time you might remember an exceptionally cold air mass that swept across Wisconsin on February 1, 1996. The next morning a state record low temperature was set at a station in the Baxter Springs State Wildlife Management Area in Sawyer County - minus 55 degrees F. The air mass caused bitter cold for a week and ranked as one of the country's most intense in the 20th century.

Almost a hundred years ago central and southern Wisconsin had a blizzard (December 27-28, 1904) that dumped over two feet of snow in places. Neilsville set the state 24-hour snowfall record of 26 inches in that storm, a record which stands today.

In two days during the Dust Bowl years (May 9th, 1934) a dust

storm hit the Central Sands Region and swept away a foot of topsoil from 20,000 acres.

One more: tornados have touched down in Wisconsin in every month except February. The earliest was on January 24, 1967 in Rock and Green counties; the latest was on December 1, 1970 in Outagamie and Shawano counties.

The book also introduces us to Wisconsinites who have been influential on weather forecasting. Increase Lapham of the UW - Madison was one of the founders of the National Weather Service. Eric Miller of Madison was the first U.S. meteorologist in the U.S. to regularly broadcast weather reports on the radio. And Reid Bryson of the UW - Madison was a longtime leader in the study of global climate change.

All in all, if you love Wisconsin and are influenced by the extremes in the weather we experience, you will like this book. It is published by the University of Wisconsin Press.

Our personal lives and our lives at work are difficult to separate in summer. The search for a balance is maybe the season's greatest task. My hope is that we all find it. ♣

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