

Diem adimere aegritudinem hominibus

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

It was some time between 190 - 159 B.C. when Terence uttered the famous words in the Latin title. Translated, it is the familiar "time heals all wounds." We are starting to see that on Wisconsin golf courses.

May 2005 has been a busy month for all Wisconsin golf course superintendents, especially those among us (a considerable number, maybe even a majority) facing the ravages of winter. It followed an equally busy April, but in May we started to see the fruits of our efforts at hurrying along turf recovery. April was the

hope and effort of bringing a return to normal; May was achievement. It felt kind of good, at least once in a while.

It was a tough winter for Wisconsin crops other than turf-grass, too. The Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service reported that nearly 70% of Wisconsin's alfalfa crop suffered some damage - about 17% was severely damaged. The blame is placed at the same doorstep as that blamed for golf turf injury - warm weather in January, melting snow and rain followed by brutal cold. Curiously, the UW Extension

forage agronomist said it was the most serious alfalfa injury since 1993, the same year we lost so much golf course turf.

Our injury was serious; in the case of alfalfa, the loss could touch one million acres. Like golf turf, the most serious damage occurred on older stands of alfalfa.

Production agriculture also saw injury to clover, rye, winter wheat and pasture ground.

If it is true that misery likes company, then we seem to have plenty of that this spring.

Good recovery requires some warm temperatures, and we



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lucked out in mid-April when we experienced a couple of weeks of above (way above!) normal warmth. In our town we had the warmest first half of April since monthly records were first kept in 1948. The first two weeks averaged a high of 67.5 degrees F., warm enough to get at least some seed out of the ground and some grass growing. Ten degrees above normal will do that!

It was a little dry, though, a circumstance that pushed the early filling of golf course irrigation systems. We were putting intake pipes into Lake Mendota two days after the ice left; the men were grateful for the wet suits we use.

It was so dry in parts of Wisconsin that fire dangers were in the extreme and high range. The DNR canceled open burning permits and stopped issuing permits in 37 counties in mid-April. Showers picked up again in mid-May and moved a lot of areas closer to the "normal to date" levels of precipitation.

May is always a delight to outdoor people. You still have that sense of spring fever, brought on by redbuds, apple blossoms and lilacs. We see our first bluebirds and orioles, and watch the slow and steady unfolding of the big exotic shagbark hickory buds. Pine and fir and spruce needles at this time of the year are soft and pleasant to run through your hand. And despite the scars of winter, the grass really gets wound up and growing, keeping the mowing machinery humming and the smell of freshly cut grass in the air.

And soon we will be, as James Whitcomb Riley put it, knee-deep in June. That also can be pure pleasure for Wisconsin golf course superintendents.

The moisture status from around the state appears here, as always, courtesy of the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service.

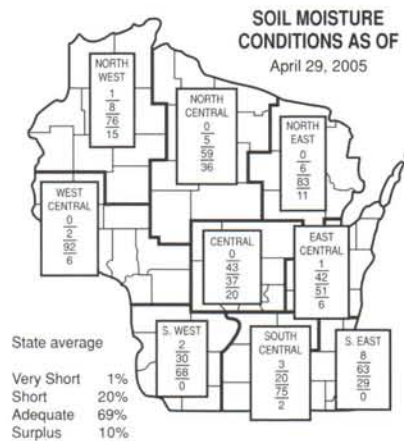
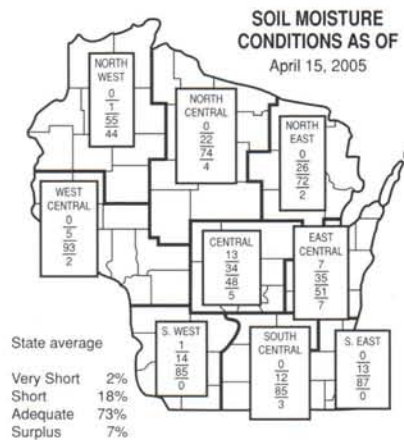
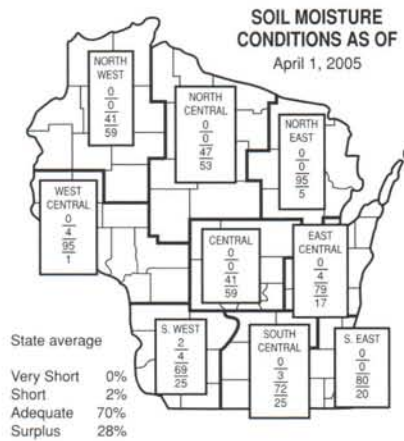
Congratulations to Michael Lee. Dr. Elton Aberle, Dean of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, appointed Mike to the CALS Board of Visitors. Mike accepted.

The invitation to serve on the CALS BOV might be the highest honor one could receive from the

College. The board is made up of leaders from all the major agricultural sectors and commodities in Wisconsin. Many of BOV members are known nationally and all of them are known statewide. The board advises the Dean on agricultural issues, and meets formally in Madison twice a year for two days for each meeting. Assignments and projects require time in the intervening periods.

Dean Aberle has been terrific about maintaining a turfgrass professional on the BOV during his tenure in office. Terry Kurth, Bliss Nicholson and Monroe S. Miller preceded Mike.

There is no doubt Mike will represent us well. Aberle wouldn't have appointed him if anything less was possible.



Along with a lot of others in golf, I applauded the USGA move to slow golf ball technology.

The Wall Street Journal reported that the USGA sent a letter to golf equipment manufacturers in April asking them for prototype golf balls that fly shorter distances than those currently allowed. It asked for two golf ball designs — one that would land 25 yards shorter on average than the USGA's current standard, and another that would fall 15 yards shorter. There was no timetable and participation was voluntary.

Future planning like this only makes sense. Many classic golf courses will be rendered obsolete if something isn't done. None other than Augusta National Golf Club has called for change, and they have been joined by many other traditional golf facilities.

Of course, there is the comment made by a technical guy from one of the manufacturers who said the solution was, "Let the grass grow a little further and you've solved your problem overnight." Spoken like a true idiot, a selfish and ignorant one at that.

The USGA needs to be encouraged and complimented for this activist stance they are taking to protect the game.

It is no secret that Steve Abler is leaving the TDL at season's end. His wife Becky has accepted a position at a junior college in Manitowoc and they will be moving to northeast Wisconsin. We'll miss him, although he will remain in our golf turf business somehow, I predict.

Others have noted the talent this young man has in the field of turfgrass pathology. The 2005 GCSAA Conference offered a seminar (2285) "Microscopic Identification of Turfgrass Diseases." There were a number of instructors, and Steve Abler was one of them. The students

attending grade all GCSAA seminars, and this seminar ranked 1st out of 100! The scale ran from 1 - 5, with 5 the highest. The ID class finished with an overall rating of 4.75.

Congratulations to Steve. There may be a few more Badgers in attendance next year in New Orleans.

My experiences and observations this spring have been that Wisconsin golfers have been very understanding and patient about the inconvenience caused by winter injury. Golf writers have been supportive — Rob Schultz and Gary D'Amato merit special thanks.

I believe we owe gratitude to Bob Vavrek and the USGA for answering endless phone calls and emails. Bob has been at the

speaker's podium in Wisconsin and surrounding states, explaining to golf players what likely happened this past winter. Our University of Wisconsin Extension people, especially Dr. John Stier, have done the same. The GCSAA and Jeff Bollig have pitched in to help us.

As I look back over nearly four decades, it is clear that golf course superintendents now more than ever recognize the value of good communication, and have confronted the issue head on at times. It is a bit of a twist on my favorite quote from Gary Player, "The more I practice, the luckier I get."

This improved communication on all fronts may be the good that has come from the bad winter. And that's no small item. ♣

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