

Short Memory

By **Bob Vavrek**, Senior agronomist, USGA North Central Region Green Section

Losses of turf that ranged in severity from annoying to devastating have been the topic of numerous updates from every Green Section region this summer. The aftermath of intense disease activity, long periods of severe heat stress, flooding for some and drought for others is still visible and definitely front and center in the minds of many golfers and superintendents...well, at least for now. However, for those of us in the northern states, it won't be all that long before a serene, snuggly blanket of pure white snow covers all the ugly scars of this summer's turf carnage.

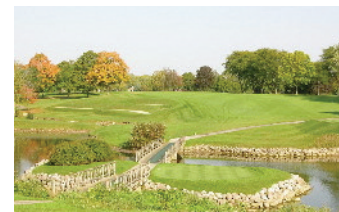
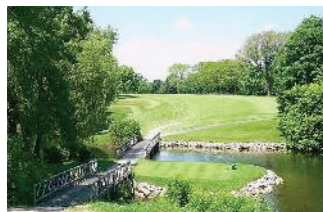
It would be great to put this difficult season completely behind us and look forward to a less stressful time. However, those who hold the purse strings need to be constantly reminded about turf maintenance issues while you prepare and submit the 2011 operating budget. Granted, money cannot magically transform a cool season grass into a warm season grass and there are times when you can cover the greens with \$100 bills and still lose turf due to extreme stress from heat or disease activity. On the other hand, deep budget cuts will definitely limit management options and make it difficult to address small turf issues before they become more serious problems.

Golfers, owners, committees, etc. tend to have short memories when it comes to unpleasant issues such as winter injury, summer stress, and disease activity. The best remedy for short memory syndrome is pictures...lots and lots of pictures. For less than \$100 you can find a very high quality digital camera that easily fits in a shirt pocket, so there is no excuse not to have the ability to document turf problems whenever they occur.

Before and after pictures provide the best bang for the buck. The advertising industry knows full well the value of before/after images or they would never be able to pitch hair transplants or weight loss programs as well as they do. A well conceived before and after image provides hope and encouragement that a problem can and will improve if a particular course of action is taken. Take full advantage of this concept throughout the process of having a maintenance budget approved by supporting your proposal with pictures.

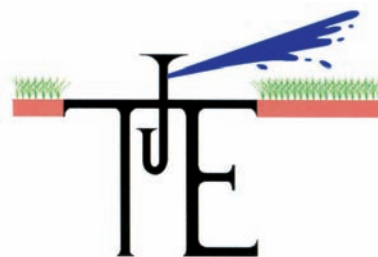
Yet a picture is worth a 1000 words only if it is a good picture. There are not many professional photographers managing golf facilities, but you can still take serviceable pictures with a little practice. Here are a few tips regarding before and after images:

What is obvious to you in a picture may not be obvious to a golfer. Use arrows, circles, or whatever to highlight



Before and after pictures are useful for documenting dramatic changes made to a golf course, such as aggressive tree removal. Try to maintain the same perspective in both images to provide the most impact.

what you want others to see. Include a caption that clearly explains the problem and how it affects the course playability. For example, you may want to show a soil profile of a green that has excessive organic matter (OM) accumulation near the surface. Golfers could care less about how the OM clogs the pore spaces and hinders water movement through the green. But, tell them that excess OM is the reason why the greens stay mushy and bumpy after irrigation or that OM is the reason why the greens are peppered with deep pitted ball marks by 3 PM each day and you just may get approval for a new aerator or a new top-dressing unit as well as the time needed to perform these important operations.



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Keep distractions, such as your shadow, out of the pictures and be aware of the background. You want the images to convey one idea, if possible. That said, you still need enough background in the image to identify the location of the problem to a player who is familiar with the course. You want players to relate to the problem in a way that makes it a personal issue. A close up of skunk damage on a fairway could be from any golf course unless there is enough background to identify the hole. You want golfers to see the problem not as an issue to “a” golf course, but as a problem on “my” golf course.

Frame before and after images carefully. A close up of winter injury next to a distant image of the site after recovery is worthless. The images need to be carbon copies of each other with respect to distance, angle and perspective. In fact, the problem you are trying to highlight should be the only difference between the two images. It will help if you keep a tree, bunker, or some other permanent course feature in the frame as a reference point, but don't make it the focal point of the image. You may be able to crop one image to approximate the size of another image using simple editing software.

Before/after images are often employed to document recovery of turf damage or to document changes made to the course, such as bunker renovation or tree removal. Be creative. For example, take a picture of a low area of the course during dry weather and compare it to the same site after heavy rainfall. This can be used to garner support for future drainage projects.

When in doubt, take many pictures and at least a few will be capable of supporting your point. Twenty digital images don't cost a cent more than one image. Keep the best and erase the rest.

On a final note, think about taking a short class regarding the basics of digital, point and shoot cameras this

winter. Adult education night classes that only require a few hours of your time are inexpensive and can be found at most local high schools, universities, technical colleges and photography shops. No exams or quizzes and an opportunity to fine tune a skill you can use for the rest of your life. Best of all, these classes do not

require an expensive camera. Practice your photography skills and they will be a valuable ally in the fight against short memory syndrome.

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