

A Wet Issue

By Jake Schneider, Assistant Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

I'm not sure how it came up, but while enjoying our day at the April monthly meeting in Lake Geneva, I made a comment to my friend, colleague, and playing partner that scrutiny of water usage on Wisconsin's golf courses will be here sooner than most think. Maybe that is a widely-held belief, but I haven't been privy to those discussions. Mostly, we think of the southeastern and southwestern portions of the US when we think of irrigation limitations on golf courses. And, truth be told, why so many golf courses are built in water-scarce areas seems rather non-sensical to me.

With approximately 15,000 inland lakes and two of the Great Lakes on our borders, Wisconsin isn't exactly one of these water-scarce areas. Of course, portions of the state were absolutely inundated with rain a few weeks after my comments at Geneva National. Recently, the Great Lakes Compact brought with it new permits and recordkeeping requirements for superintendents in northern and eastern Wisconsin. In June 2016, a statewide water-use report will be released and is

likely to have a significant effect on future irrigation-related policies. It's no secret that golf courses seem to be easy targets for environmentally-based restrictions despite the fact that they are a drop in the bucket when it comes to these issues.

For several years, the media has latched onto diminished groundwater levels and lakes that have dried up in the central sands portion of the state. Angry cabin owners and dry lakes make for an interesting story and rightfully so. Even though Mother Nature may have more to do with these changes than do high-capacity and agricultural wells, we know as well as anyone that you can't control the weather, but you certainly can control wells. And, unfortunately for us (for a number of reasons), far more people eat potatoes than play golf.

Who knows exactly what the future will bring, and I certainly hope that we won't be battling this issue in the coming years. In the meantime, I believe that the greatest defense that we can provide is to become the best water managers that we can be... and to record it. Chances are that you're

already doing all that you can to water wisely, and irrigation audits, soil moisture meters, improved sprinkler components, and ET-based irrigation are becoming commonplace and leading us in the right direction. None of it is cheap or easy, but doing as much as we can is necessary. Although potato eaters outnumber golfers, said french fry aficionados aren't very likely to notice when potatoes plug in the fairway when it hasn't rained in two weeks (This sentence does, in fact, make sense in my scrambled brain). In other words, oversaturated fairways are noticed more often than soggy farm fields.

Contrary to popular (cough, cough) opinion, my predictions have been wrong before. Remember that article where I predicted that artificial turf would become more common on golf courses? No? Good. Well, if the man shuts down our water, both gloomy predictions may come true at the same time. Let's make sure that that doesn't happen. Our golf courses and environment will be better because of it.



Water conservation should be followed by all turf managers before it is a regulation. In this picture a adjustable rotation head allows the green to be watered but not the sand bunker or nearby pond.