

Thirsty Golf Courses Choking on Water-Usage Bills

MGCSA Organizes Economic and Water Use Committee

More and more states are examining their water usage, and some, like Arizona and California, are turning to the legislative process for controls. Golf course superintendents across the country have watched the trend with trepidation, yet many presume the problems to be restricted to the arid, water-deficient Southwest.

Their fears may soon become reality.

Of all places, Minnesota, the "land of 10,000 lakes," is facing the very real possibility of state-regulated water usage restrictions.

Kerry Glader, president of the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendent's Association (MGCSA) said, "In 1988, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) imposed watering restrictions on a number of golf courses throughout the state. At one time, several courses in Minneapolis and out-state Minnesota were totally cut off and other courses, including several in St. Paul, were under severe water usage restrictions."

The Golf Course Superintendents' Association acknowledges that conservation measures may be required during drought-caused water shortages like those experienced in 1988, but they feel restrictions need to be fair and consistent and imposed evenhandedly throughout the state," he said.

As a result of last summer's drought and subsequent restrictions on water usage by Minnesota golf courses, the

MGCSA formed the Minnesota Golf Course Economic and Water Use Committee, hereinafter referred to as MGCEWU. Scott Hoffman, past president of the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents' Association, was elected to chair the committee.

The committee immediately authorized a survey to assess current water usage and sources and to clarify the golf industry's impact on the overall economy and quality of life of the state of Minnesota. In addition to Hoffman, the committee consists of Stephen Gladen, Keith Scott and James R. Watson.

Speaking for the MGCSA, Scott said, "We understood the prevailing attitude towards our industry, and we knew we didn't have a case without some hard facts and figures about our industry and its contributions to the communities and the state as a whole. When farmers are losing their crops, there can't be a lot of sympathy towards a dried-out or even burned-out golf course."

The survey included 150 private and public golf courses in Minnesota. Here are some of the findings:

- Rounds of golf played in Minnesota in 1988, the year of the most severe drought on record, was estimated in excess of 8.5 million, generating approximately \$255 million in revenues.
- Of these 8.5+ million rounds, 1.7 million were estimated to have been played by tourists and out-of-town visitors, corroborating the significant correlation between golf and tourism.
- Golf courses employ more than 16,000 Minnesotans on a permanent year-round basis and hundreds, mainly students, on a part-time basis.

According to Hoffman, this is the first time that this kind of information on the golf course industry in Minnesota as a whole has been compiled. He said it will be shared with the MGCSA, state agencies, community leaders and golf related businesses who share in the concern for Minnesota's economy, water resources and quality of life.

He said the survey showed golf courses are an integral part of the community and play an important role both in terms of economics and quality of life. He pointed out that:

(1) 75 percent of the courses surveyed sponsored charitable tournaments and other outside, community-based events;

(2) In 1988, those courses hosted more than 62 events for junior high school through college level golfers and raised thousands of dollars for charities;

(3) In 1991, Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska will be host to the U.S. Open tournament, projected to bring more than \$20 million dollars into the state, and

(4) The golf course business is the livelihood of some 16,000 Minnesotan families. (The latter does not take into account hundreds of others in related businesses whose job security depends upon healthy golf courses). Hardly figures to be taken lightly.

"We're not ignoring water shortage problems," Glader said.

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Thirsty Golf Courses—

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"We're keenly aware of how precious Minnesota's water supply is and that was substantiated in the survey which showed 80 percent of our golf courses are using some kind of water conservation practices including computerized irrigation controls for greater efficiency, wetting agents and the use of less water-demanding strains of grasses."

"Lest we should become complacent in the years with normal rainfalls, the MGSCA continues to urge our members to hold their water usage to an absolute minimum, and we're working closely with irrigation industry leaders to develop efficient watering systems," Hoffman said.

He said they plan to share tips with the public on how to conserve water from what they have learned about good watering practices, height of cut, cultivation (aeration), fertilization and the use of drought-resistant strains of grass.

"Without water, we're out of business. It's important that regulatory agencies and the public understand this. It's equally important that they understand what will be the implications and economic impact on the economic health, vitality and quality of life in Minnesota if golf courses fall short of their fair allocations."

Dr. James R. Watson, Toro's chief agronomist and an acknowledged expert in the field of turf management worldwide, is deeply involved with the MGSCA and other groups around the world in developing and improving water conservation methods for turf maintenance. He cites technological advance-

ments including low-pressure sprinkler heads and computerized irrigation controllers and soil moisture sensor devices as examples of how manufacturers are responding to the unquestioned need to conserve water, the nation's most precious commodity.

Dr. Watson said, "The concept of low-pressure sprinkling and total control of water distribution means that golf courses will be able to manage their water and maintenance costs more accurately."

According to Watson, low-pressure sprinkler heads spread water more evenly than traditional heads and use less water to accomplish their task. Computerized irrigation controllers permit precise water application by taking into account a variety of factors (daily weather changes, evaporation rates, soil and turf types) before computing the amount of water necessary to sustain turf health and growth.

"Water conservation is a worldwide concern," Dr. Watson said. Everyone involved in any way with the golf industry in Minnesota is pleased to see that advancements being made on golf courses, both through improved equipment and better management practices, are setting the standards for the way we regard and use our precious water resources."

The Minnesota Golf Course Economic and Water Usage Committee and government officials are holding discussions on this crucial issue, and it appears there is support for the case being made by the committee.

Hoffman sums it up like this: "If it can happen in Minnesota, it can happen anywhere! If you're in the golf business, I would advise you to invest in the latest state-of-the-art irrigation system, start planting hardy species of grass, trees and shrubs, and prepare for the time when all water usage will be legislatively controlled and restricted. As I see it, if you're not monitoring your water supply carefully, someone else probably will with results that very likely will be untenable to all of us."

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