

Use of Wetlands for Golf Courses Discussed at Environmental Forum

Healthy, thriving ponds and wetland areas are complex ecosystems capable of supporting an almost limitless variety of microorganisms and wildlife. Protection of wetlands and other valuable aquatic habitat has become an important part of golf course management.

The forum "Government Relations, Golf Course Management and the Future," sponsored by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), provided an in-depth discussion of this controversial topic.

The wetlands issue has heated up in the past few months with the anticipation of the soon-to-be-released wetlands delineation manual, as well as the introduction of a House of Representatives bill that would drastically change the wetland classification and permitting system.

The wetlands portion of the forum featured three speakers involved in the wetlands issue: John Meagher, director of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Wetland Office; John Studt, chief of enforcement for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Congressman Jimmy Hayes (D-La.), sponsor of House Resolution 1330, the new wetlands bill.

Meagher explained that wetlands are protected in order to preserve plant and animal life, reduce flooding (wetlands often hold floodwaters) and to filter and improve water quality.

"In recent years, the loss of wetlands has been reduced from 450,000 acres to about 300,000 acres a year," Meagher said. The population of some species of animals, especially birds, have been reduced by 60 percent to 70 percent because of loss of wetlands habitat, and some species have become extinct, Meagher said.

"Delineation is a scientifically complex issue," Meagher said. "Wetlands are typically transitional areas between open water and dry upland." They are zone areas that gradually change and there are no great lines or boundaries."

He said that he hoped that the new manual would clarify how wetlands can be accurately identified, noting that the 1989 delineation manual allowed non-scientists to determine what constituted a wetland.

Meagher added that he hoped the new manual will help trained EPA personnel to make more accurate determinations.

Studt encouraged the integration of existing wetland areas into plans for golf course construction.

"Incorporating these areas as open green space and hazards is something you should strive for," he said.

Commenting on efforts since 1980 to streamline the wetlands permitting process, he said, "We need to go further. Streamlining the program and making it run better and getting decisions for applicants sooner is something we are trying to strive for."

Studt stated that the Bush administration has made efforts to get the EPA and the Corps of Engineers to work together. He said the renewed cooperation has improved the effectiveness of the wetlands program.

GCSAA Director Charles T. Passios, CGCS, said, "As reconfirmed by John Studt's comments, incorporating wetlands into the design of golf courses is one answer to the wetlands problem. However, clarifying the definition of what is or isn't a wetland would greatly assist in the protection of true wetland areas."

Congressman Hayes blasted existing wetlands regulations and the new delineation manual.

"Something as important as a national wetlands policy should not be written by a half dozen people without public debate as a draft (amendment) to a 20-year-old water bill," said Hayes. "Such decisions about public policy should be left up to the 435 members of the House of Representatives and the 100 members of the Senate and reviewed by the executive branch, all of whom are elected."

The present wetlands policy, according to Hayes, is confusing, unclear and might not let landowners know for years whether they are in violation of a wetlands law.

Under the Hayes bill, value and functional use would determine which of three classifications a wetland site would fall under. Class A, valuable in function and in use, would be heavily protected. The types of wetlands included under Class A would vary in different regions of the country because of this "value and use" determination.

"What may be valuable in Nebraska may not be considered valuable in Louisiana," Hayes explained.

Class C wetlands would include some existing residential areas and lands that are not considered valuable or environmentally important. A landowner would not need a permit to build on or to fill these types of wetlands. Class B would fall in between, but the landowner would need a permit to fill or develop these areas.

1991 MGCSA Monthly Meeting Sites

Date	Location	Sponsor
Sept. 16	Golden Valley CC & Oak Ridge CC Research Tournament (dinner at Oak Ridge)	
Oct. 7	Hastings CC (lunch)	R & W Golf Cars
November (first wk.)	Weather permitting, Golf at Faribault G&CC	
November 20-21-22	Annual Conference Northland Inn	