

Commission Proposes Golf Tax

In an attempt to generate revenue, the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission has turned to a proposed golf tax, setting of quite a debate outside the walls of Tallahassee.

In a report published in the *Orlando Sentinel*, the proposed 25-cent per round fee would generate approximately \$14 million that the commission does not feel it can additionally charge for hunting and fishing licenses. Instead, the golf fee would support game programs, including those to offset the "environmental harm" done by golf courses, according to the commission. It says that "Golf courses consume a significant amount of native wildlife habitat and more are under construction," and that "chemicals used on courses can hurt the environment."

The golf industry is having none of it.

An unprecedented meeting of golf agencies, including the PGA Tour, the PGA of America, the Florida Turfgrass Association, the National Golf Foundation, the National Golf Course Owners Association, the Florida Golf Council and the Golf Course Superintendents Association, has resulted in a unified "no new tax" stand, stating that the tax would "unfairly and without justification discriminate against Florida's golfers."

In a lengthy letter sent to the game commission, the signees argue that golf courses *do not* significantly add to environmental damage, and in fact of all the pesticides and chemicals sold in Florida, only a fraction of one percent (0.13%) of the dollars spent on chemicals are spent on a golf course. In other words, such an environmental tax could much better be targeted to larger companies, agricultural industries or even citizen John Smith, who sprays his yard with unregulated and probably excessive amounts of chemical each week. Further, the golf industry already spends millions regulating itself for such environmental concerns, and does not see the need to be taxed for research it is already conducting.

Moreover, golf courses do far more good than harm, and that any alleged environmental damage is a "joke". Courses "create extensive and varied edge habitats, which provide excellent foraging conditions," the response argues. "Many birds (e.g. eagles, scrub jays, sandhill cranes) thrive in golf course settings." Additionally Florida's turf industry research has developed grasses which use less water and which are pest-resistant, not to mention the development of many golf courses that directly benefit an area by serving as facilities where wastewater (effluent) can be used and processed at no additional environmental or financial cost.

Finally, the golf industry contends, it is clear the commission has identified the golf community as an easy tar-

get for a new tax to fund its existing programs, and moreover has developed a flimsy smokescreen of reasons to justify the tax. As there is no organized special interest group for golf in Tallahassee (unlike other industries), the golf industry speculates the game commission did not see any lobbyists to complain about the tax, and reasoned they could get it pushed through without opposition.

If you agree with the contention that this proposed tax is fundamentally wrong, you are urged to write your state representative or legislator and/or the game commission. After all, as a golfer YOU are the one who will ultimately bear this new financial burden. Sure, it's only 25-cents now, but once enacted, you can bet your 'skin's money' it will soon become 50 cents, then one dollar and so on. Get involved—let them know this whole proposition is "Out of Bounds"!

For more information or to get involved, contact Bob Young at the Florida Turfgrass Association, (407) 898-6721.

—*Golfer's Guide*

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