Greenskeepers Grow With Flow

Moisture Extremes Tax Superintendents

By JON ROE

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If it's not one thing, it's another in the life of a greens superintendent in Minnesota. Early in the golf season, superintendents had to deal with trying to get grass to grow in the cold weather. Then, they were trying to handle a lack of moisture.

That has obviously not been a problem the last week or two, but that doesn't mean there haven't been other concerns for the caretakers of state golf courses. Now they're laboring daily to handle all of the rain and storm damage from recent downpours. And there's even more to worry about.

The high temperatures, high humidity and still air have generated diseases — pythium and brown patch — that can ravage a course in a day or two.

"If pythium gets started it can kill the grass on a course in 24 hours," said Tom Fischer, superintendent at Edinburgh USA. "Any time you get night-time temperatures in the 70s with humidity in the 60s and 90s, the conditions are at the maximum to get those kinds of diseases started. You can lose the grass that quickly."

All of that comes along with pumping water out of bunkers, and repairing bunkers after the rains have washed out the sand. Also, superintendents must pump water out of low spots in fairways and make sure that water hazards — ponds, creeks and lakes — don't overflow their banks and cause more damage.

Several courses, including Interlachen, have been battling fungus problems. The situation is compounded by the difficulty of getting equipment to control the fungus on the course, since the roughs and fairways are water-logged and subject to ruts

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and other damage. Furthermore, a 24-hour period without rain is needed to allow the spraying to be effective.

"We've had 16¾ inches of rain since June 28, and the normal amount for July is 3½ inches," said John Katterheinrich, Interlachen superintendent. "We rented some machines with 4-inch pipes to try to pump the water out of fairways and bunkers. But the tanks, which hold 300 gallons, for spraying are tough to get out on the course without doing some damage. And the daily message to the work crew is to shovel out bunkers — both to get the water out and to repair the washout problems.

"We had the course open for walkers only on Thursday, we were debating what to allow on Friday, and we'll probably have to keep carts off for a few days. In our business, it seems like it's always some kind of catastrophe, something we're complaining about."

Scott Nelson, director of special services for the five Minneapolis public courses, said Hiawatha has been the hardest hit, although Wirth also had to close the front nine for a couple of days last week. Gross, Columbia and Meadowbrook, which got a new drainage system last summer, came through in good shape, Nelson said.

"We closed all of Hiawatha for two days, but then opened it again at the end of the week," Nelson said. "The lakes there are close to going over their banks, and we couldn't guarantee anything, so we had the Bronze Amateur moved to Rich Acres for the weekend."

Different Problem

At Edina Country Club, there's a different problem. The course was closed last year for remodeling. New greens were put down with sod from Pennsylvania. The course opened earlier in the season, and pro Marty Lass said as many as 300 rounds a day were being played.

Then came the rains.

"We got what is called bent grass decline," Lass said. "The grass roots are so new that when it started to rain, the roots began growing back up instead of down and some areas on the greens got thin from the wear of playing.

"A representative of the United States Golf Association came in and recommended that we aerify the greens and rest them for a while. We'll probably open up for play again around August 5."