

GCSAA Examines Management Practices

First-Ever National Survey Reflects Positively on Golf Courses

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Results of the first comprehensive national survey of golf course management practices in the United States indicate golf facilities can be maintained in a manner that is compatible with the environment. These findings were released recently at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) International Golf Course Conference and Show in Dallas, February 11-17.

"More so than the results, the most important news is a process is in place to examine the performance of golf courses," said GCSAA President Tommy Witt, CGCS. "The debate about golf's impact on the environment has been clouded by a lack of complete and nationally-aggregated data that has led proponents of pro-golf and anti-golf factions to make assertions that have not necessarily been supported by fact. As we conduct this annual survey, we will be collecting data that will be used to assist golf courses in their operations."

Perhaps the most revealing finding was the importance of golf facility green spaces for protecting and managing various types of wildlife habitat. Approximately 63 percent of survey respondents indicated their golf courses managed specifically for wildlife. In addition, facilities owned or controlled an average of 100.3 acres of wildlife habitat.

Earlier this fall, GCSAA sent surveys to 11,000 member golf course superintendents (Class A and B) posing a significant number of agronomic and economic questions such as grass types, number of rounds, length of season and maintenance budgets. In order to collect data for a two-year trial, half of the superintendents provided information for 1999 and the other half for 2000. GCSAA's goal is to conduct the survey on an annual basis with the purpose of analyzing trends and examining smaller components of golf facility management.

"It would be fair to characterize our first effort as solid, but limited," Witt said. We collected a tremendous amount of data, but not enough information to allow for extensive interpretation. We hope to improve the survey instrument in the future to provide even more definitive results."

Among the survey findings were:

An average golf facility covers 150 acres, with 111.5 of

that reflected as managed turf.

62.9 percent of survey respondents indicated their golf courses managed specifically for wildlife. In addition, facilities owned or controlled an average of 100.3 acres of wildlife habitat. The most common forms of habitat are freshwater bodies (found on 78.8 percent of golf courses), deciduous woodlands (67.9 percent), wetlands (51.9 percent) and streams/rivers (48.9 percent).

Median golf course irrigation water use is 78 acres or 70 percent of managed turf areas. The national irrigation median is the equivalent of 13.5 inches applied to irrigated areas per year.

85.4 percent of golf courses have at least one certified pesticide applicator, with an average of two certified applicators per golf course. It should be noted that some states do not require certification for golf courses, while other states require certification for restricted use pesticides which golf courses typically do not use.

The survey was conducted under the auspices of the Golf and Environment Initiative – a consortium of more than 20 golf associations and environmental organizations that have been examining the game's relationship with the environment since 1995. As a member of the Initiative, GCSAA voluntarily surveyed its members as part of a collaborative effort to build a national database of environmental data for golf courses.

"This is an important step in collecting objective data that both the golf industry and the environmental community can use to evaluate environmental conditions on golf courses," said Paul Parker, executive vice president of The Center for Resource Management. The Center is a non profit organization which manages and facilitates the Golf and Environment Initiative.

Witt expressed his pleasure with the results of the survey because they validate a significant body of research that has been conducted by numerous agencies during the last two decades.

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