

GOLF

The Most Environmentally Unfriendly Sport

By Don Gordon, Mankato Free Press

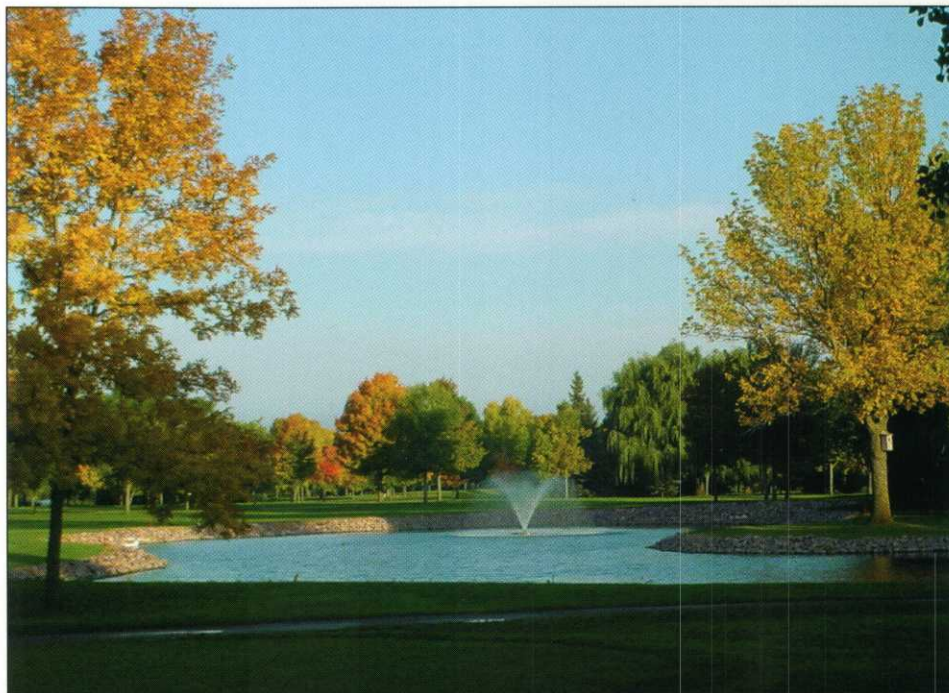
(Editor's Note: The following article appeared in the March 6, 2004, edition of the Mankato Free Press. Mankato Golf Club Superintendent and MGCSA past president Fred Taylor, CGCS, wrote a rebuttal to the views of the following article. You can find Taylor's rebuttal at the conclusion of the article on Page 7.)

Can you guess what is the world's most environmentally destructive sport? In the March/April issue of the journal Worldwatch, golf gets the infamous prize.

Here are some contrasting statistics from the journal which illustrate why golf is getting so much attention.

Water

It would take 2.5 billion gallons per



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day to support 4.7 million people at the United Nations daily minimum. An equal amount is needed daily to irrigate the world's courses. The amount of water used daily on one golf course in Thailand would be enough to supply a city of 60,000.

Pesticides

The average amount of pesticides used per acre by the world's farmers is 2.7 pounds. In contrast the average golf course uses 18 pounds per acre per year. I should point out that many golf courses use considerably less water and pesticides than the world averages. The progressive ones, including some locally, are reducing pesticide use by employing IPM (Integrated Pest Management).

In many areas, golf courses are saving water by using "gray" or recycled water. Perhaps the biggest environmental problem with golf is the impact it has had on home lawns. As a society, the standard for the lawn has become the golf course. For home lawns we now often plant elite grasses that were specifically designed for golf courses. These grasses are not overly disease resistant and they demand frequent water and nutrients.

I am convinced that future generations will find it hard to believe that our generation squandered the last drop of water from the Mt. Simon Aquifer to grow a grass that we can't even eat.

In an election year almost any criticism of President Bush will be dismissed by many as politically motivated, but when top scientists, many of whom served as past advisors to Republican presidents, speak out, it seems prudent to at least investigate the claims. The journal

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Golf Courses –

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Science and The Detroit Free Press recently reported that 20 Nobel prize winners and scores of other top U.S. scientists are accusing the Bush administration of “suppressing, distorting or manipulating the work done by scientists at federal agencies.”

According to the reports, a Minnesota example of this suppression involved research findings by former USDA microbiologist, Michael Zahn. Zahn was studying antibiotic use on pig farms in Southwestern Minnesota, Northern Missouri and Iowa.

Quite by accident he found airborne bacteria were expelled from these farms and he speculated that heavy antibiotic use could produce resistant bacteria that could be inhaled by humans. Zahn thought his findings could have a potential impact on human health, but he claims the Bush administration stopped him from publishing the data 11 times.

Science reports that the Union of

Concerned Scientists has lambasted the White House for “ignoring or suppressing findings that don’t support the Administration’s views on everything from Iraqi weapons to climate change.” The Bush administration has fiercely denied the charges.

(Editor’s Note: Don Gordon is professor emeritus of botany at Minnesota State University. Send questions concerning horticulture or the environment with a stamped self-addressed envelope to him at 52974 Deerwood Trail, North Mankato, MN 56003 or e-mail to osokato@aol.com.)

Rebuttal By Fred Taylor, CGCS, Mankato Golf Club

After spending a lifetime on local golf courses, I am compelled to respond to Dr. Don Gordon's column of March 6. Although I have a deep respect for his knowledge of our environment and horticulture, the sensational headline denouncing golf as a major contributor to the

decline of our environment falls short of his genius. There is no doubt that golf courses use fertilizers, water and pesticides; however, the implication that golf courses are indiscriminately applying these products and squandering resources is an undeserving charge against the sport and the professionals who manage the world's golf courses.

Referring to Worldwatch, Gordon says the average course uses 18 pounds of pesticides per acre annually. This may or may not be factual, but the average golf course is using fewer pesticides than in the past. Newer chemistries have reduced use rates while improving efficacy. Where an older product may have needed one half of a pound per thousand square feet, some of the newer rates are typically from one-half to one-quarter ounces. In addition, university testing has shown synergism with some older fungicides that have reduced their rates by as much as 50%. Biological control products are also being used by superintendents to complement their chemical and cultural programs, further

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