

Nature-Friendly Golf

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People who love to golf also love nature. People who maintain golf courses love nature too. The traditional reputation of golf courses, however, is less than nature friendly. Golf courses are frequently shunned by those whose job it is to defend nature as places which demand too many natural resources in order to play a game.

I must admit to being one of those who long refused to pick up a golf club because I thought I was hurting the very nature I fought so hard to protect. My parents, aunts and uncles all loved the game that I dismissed because of my opinion that nature and golf were strange bedfellows.

That has all changed. It has changed because of the very fact that we now live in a time when golf courses are often the most undeveloped areas in a community. In a time of exponential human population growth, they are being threatened with being turned into housing developments.

I have come to realize that a fairway is much better than a driveway as far as the environment is concerned. A fairway maintained in the most sustainable way is even better. Enter the Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) for Golf Courses. The ACSP outlines ways in which courses can enroll in a program which will support them in their quest to become more nature friendly.

It's an idea whose time has come. With over 2/ million acres dedicated to golf courses throughout the United States, there is a wonderful opportunity to save and protect waterways, make courses more wildlife friendly and improve the aesthetics for golfers all at the same time. Golf courses can become a more recognized part of the green corridors so desperately needed for migrating birds.

The ACSP program asks its managers to look at their entire course and come up with an environmental plan. It also asks for a special project to be done which can be anything from installing a butterfly garden to creating wildflower- laden prairies in out-of-play areas. Water quality monitoring, chemical control and wildlife monitoring are required.

To busy golf course managers this can seem like another daunting task on top of work weeks already bursting at the seams. I would argue that the best of courses are already doing most of what is on the list of things to do. I would also say that it is a tremendous opportunity to seek out your local naturalist to help you in your application process. That's what they did at the Braemar golf course in Edina and I am ever so grateful. My involvement in helping them to achieve their certification has opened my eyes to the great natural experiences that await on a golf course.

Since then I have been assisting over seven different courses with their certification and would love to add more to my list. It is great fun to make new friends with course managers and talk about the environment. As a nature center manager I find that we have so much in common. Whether it's buckthorn control, or prairie burning, water quality measuring or getting people to follow the messages on your signs, there is a lot to discuss.

Look out world, I have taken up the sport too. Though I will always be more excited to see a rare bird than to get an even

rarer birdie, it's given me new eyes and credibility as far as being able to give advice to golf course managers.

As an official steward for Audubon International, I would like to personally invite all golf courses, public and private, in Minnesota to get involved in this program. It will do the right thing, make new audiences and add new reasons to keep your course open in light of the pressure to have your land converted into yet another housing development. Your site will no longer be just a golf course, you will be a wildlife sanctuary acting to protect an open space for the benefit of all. Imagine bird hikes added to the list of what people can do on your courses!

Once certified, there are more opportunities to make even more positive changes to keep up the certification. I would personally love to see Audubon International courses look at their whole operations from an environmental perspective, from the greener paper products they could buy to the locally grown organic food they could offer.

To find out more about how to enroll in the program go to www.auduboninternational.com and hit programs. You can also contact me at kshragg@cityofrichfield.org. Happy golfing and happy birding and may they be all done at the same place, your golf course.

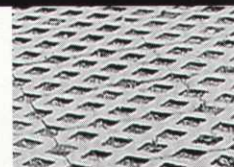


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