



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

“Hurry up and wait.”

Perhaps my greatest fault, at least from my perspective, is my inability to maintain patience. Although not quick to become angry, my frustration level can be accelerated if I do not focus upon patience, especially when working in the bureaucracy of the public arena.

As a golf course superintendent in the private sector with somewhat autonomous management, I could appreciate a challenge, create a solution and put the remedy into place quickly and confidently...of course taking budgetary and time limitations into account. However, when working with the state and national governments, “fast-tracking,” which is a really good idea, just doesn’t happen much and likely ever on my timetable.

It isn’t that progress can’t be made through enlisting the aide of state

agencies, forging relationships and promotion of ideas. Rather, it just takes a lot of time and I need to temper my expectations, realizing that the operational pace is intentionally slow to fully vet the proposal with all involved stakeholders. Their constituents always scrutinize state agency actions.

Under the direction of the Board of Directors, shortly after becoming your Executive Director, I placed emphasis upon existing opportunities and relationships with our state agencies in an effort to promote the good story of our industry and pursue support for our environmental stewardship initiatives. For the first year and a half, the attention we received was topical and didn’t carry the emphasis I had anticipated, especially considering the energy we were putting into our self-promotional campaign. Last year, the Minnesota Bureau of Water and Soil Resources picked up our initiative with great enthusiasm.

Since that time the MGCSA, UMN and our golf allies have conducted several meetings with BWSR, and the state agencies MDA, DNR and MPCA, in an effort to create a plan which would allow continuous access to water, although limited in times of drought, in exchange for individual course certification. The idea is simple to understand: if a club is willing to fulfill certification through the implementation of industry accepted BMPs and documented compliance with all state regulations, including the creation of a crisis irrigation management plan, that club would never have its water permit suspended completely; thus insuring a viable economic destination.

The same certification principal should be acceptable for securing access to plant protectants and nutrients when they come under scrutiny, which they will, also.

This 'concept' if implemented today, would only impact the surface water users consisting of roughly 20 percent of all golf courses in

Minnesota, as those waters are continuously monitored for flow and depth. However, and this must be recognized by the golf industry now and into the future, I am learning through participation at groundwater strategic planning sessions that water stored, used and recharged in our aquifers is now measured on a regular basis with additional monitoring wells coming on line regularly. This increase in surveillance will eventually impact groundwater users and make them equally susceptible to permit suspension like their surface water peers.

“Patience, patience”, I counsel myself. Moving forward at my pace is impossible and sometimes it seems that we move backwards on this project, but we do now know what a few of our agencies currently desire:

The MDA would like compliance of existing regulations and to that end, have even created a special communication position and program specific for golf courses.

The MDA also would like to see

an assessment of the industry. Sam Bauer and the UMN are picking up this pilot plan. The material will provide representative information from a range of clubs and include both surface and aquifer water users.

The DNR would like to see the MGCSA encourage the surface water users to drill wells for greater assurance of access to water or find alternative sources. Options being suggested include using waste water from local industries and drilling a small well with a 'kicker' pump to irrigate tees and greens when the surface water permits are suspended. Some access is better than none.

The MPCA would like to see the development of practical BMPs to support pollution prevention. This background material is already available and ready to roll when the time is right.

Will fulfilling these criteria promise access to limited water during times of crisis? Will developing an Environmental Stewardship Certification program assure the

Minnesota golf industry access to nutrients and pesticides when they become micro-managed? We don't know yet, as the process is still in the beginning stages and current regulations don't allow for changes.

Is this endeavor worthwhile? Yes. Something we do know is that our interest in working with state agencies for the public good is highly regarded by the MDA, DNR, MPCA and BWSR. Also, the MGCSA's presence upon several agency committees also lends viability to our professionalism and good intentions.

Will this project be completed on my timeline? No, and I need to take a pill to suppress my type 'A' expectations. With your endorsement I will continue to position our industry in the best possible light, and help provide you, the members of the MGCSA, materials on how you can do your part to support the initiative. Without your help, insuring the access to water, nutrients and plant protectants likely will not happen.

