

# The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses

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## Objectives:

1. Enhance wildlife habitats on golf courses by working with the golf course superintendent and providing advice for ecologically sound course management.
2. Encourage active participation in conservation programs by golfers, golf course superintendents, golf officials, and the general public.
3. Recognize the people who are actively participating in environmentally responsible projects.
4. Educate the public and golfing community about the benefits of golf courses and the role they play relative to the environment and wildlife.

**Start Date:** 1991

**Project Duration:** Ongoing

**Total Funding:** \$75,000/year

Audubon International is a nonprofit environmental organization that envisions communities becoming more sustainable through good stewardship of the natural environment where people live, work, and recreate through responsible management of land, water, wildlife, and other natural resources. Since 1991, it has worked in partnership with the USGA to offer the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP), an award-winning education and certification program that promotes ecologically sound land management and the conservation of natural resources on golf courses. Audubon Signature Programs also provides comprehensive environmental education and planning assistance to new developments.

Today, 2,265 golf courses in 32 countries participate in the ACSP for Golf Courses. More than 80% of those enrolled have developed an environmental plan to guide management of the golf course and more than 800 have achieved certification for their outstanding best practices. We also awarded 875 “Certificates of Achievement” to recognize golf courses for outstanding accomplishments to improve wildlife habitat, save water, conserve energy, and reduce waste.

Audubon International provided environmental planning services to 160 projects (129 golf-related) in 37 U.S. states and in six countries, covering more than 75,000 acres of land, through the Audubon Signature Programs in 2009-10. Five projects achieved certification, bringing the total number of golf courses that have been designated as Certified Audubon Signature Sanctuaries to 89 in 27 states and five countries.

Conducted first in 2001 and later



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in 2010, the Managed Lands Survey for Golf, a survey of ACSP for Golf Course members, indicated areas of great success as well as areas for improvement. With a 25% survey return rate, the results are focused on three critical environmental areas: chemical use reduction and safety, wildlife and habitat management, and water quality and conservation, as well as participant attitudes. Once again, the efforts of golf course superintendents, managers, course staff, and golfers themselves have shown to be worthy of praise and recognition.

The survey revealed the following in each of the key research areas:

- In the area of chemical use, reduction and safety, 69% of respondents reduced pesticide costs with an additional 94% reducing pesticide use itself. Additionally, 95% of respondents used pesticides with lower toxicity levels. Fertilizer costs have also been reduced by 66% of respondents, and fuel costs by 44%, decreasing operation overhead.

- Efforts to address wildlife and habitat

management have been equally effective, with 89% choosing native plants when landscaping, as compared to 49% before joining the program. Likewise, the average percentage of pond shoreline naturalized, since joining the program, increased more than 40%, creating more habitat.

- When examining water quality and conservation efforts, 68% of courses who responded had improved their irrigation system or the way that water was applied to the site. As a result, these golf courses saved an estimated 2 million gal of water per year per course since joining ACSP—totaling over 500 million gal per year. Likewise, 88% of golf course managers and superintendents have increased mowing heights along the water's edge to slow and filter runoff since joining the program. Additionally, 91% of respondents have implemented primary and secondary spill containment systems.

## Summary Points

- Number of golf courses enrolled in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP): 2,265

- Number of golf courses enrolled in the Audubon Signature Program: 129

- Total number of acres registered in ACSP for Golf Courses: 477,565

- Number of conservation organizations directly involved with golf courses as a result of their participation in the ACSP: >500

- Number of Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Golf Courses: 721

- Number of Certified Audubon Signature Golf Courses: 89

- Total number of golf courses certified in Environmental Planning: 1,340

- Number of golf course personnel and others educated by Audubon International in 2009/10 through seminars, conference presentations, and site visits: > 2,000