

Establishing A Long Range Improvement Plan

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Golf courses are complex facilities consisting of natural systems and man-made elements. Together, when working properly, they're wonderful place to spend time with our friends play the game we all love. But without continued vigilance and planning, they can slowly erode to the point where they're no longer fun to play, and worse yet, for an owner or a member, become unprofitable. Preparing a long range improvement plan is the best way to get, or keep, your course on the path of excellence.

The best place to start is to select a qualified golf course architect to guide you through the process. The architect is important for a number of reasons. First, he or she brings an unbiased viewpoint to the project. No matter how hard we may try, we all have very strong opinions about our own golf course. These are usually based upon our individual style of play and experience. These opinions are bound to influence our decisions as to what is wrong with our golf course and taint any objectivity we may have. The architect should listen to input from all of the pertinent parties, but focus only upon what is best for the long term good of the golf course.

Second, the golf course architect acts as sort of a lightning rod throughout the entire process. This is especially true at private clubs where controversial changes are sometimes necessary.

Third, and certainly the most important reason to work with a golf course architect,

is the experience and expertise that he brings to the project. Interview several competent golf course architects. Ask them to explain their design process, how must interaction there will be with you as the client, and what their final work product will be. Lists of golf course architects are available from both the National Golf Foundation and the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Working together, the golf course architect and golf course representatives should establish the needs and goals of the golf course. Many times a long range plan is suggested by the need to accommodate increased play, the addition of a new building, or the expansion of the facility. Although the idea for a plan may be triggered by a single issue, any long range plan should include a complete review of the golf course. The obvious place to start is with the major golf course components: tees, greens, bunkers, and lakes. It is important that the aesthetic value and playability of the course also be reviewed. With the swift changes in equipment and the ever increasing sophistication of today's golfers, this is a good opportunity to be sure that the course is still challenging and appealing to the golfer. Less glamorous, but, just as important to a successful golf course, are issues such as drainage, irrigation, cart paths, trees, and safety. Although a comprehensive review of the golf course is suggested, not all long range plans involve extensive changes to the golf course. In many instances, the problem areas may amount to only a few specific items such as cart paths, bunkers, or tees.

There are three major components to a

quality long range plan.

1. A graphic plan illustrating all of the changes proposed for the golf course. This can be prepared on a hole-by-hole basis or by illustrating the entire golf course on one plan.

2. A priority list of all the proposed projects. This list requires careful consideration so that the projects are completed in the proper order without having to repeat previous work. A good priority list will group the projects together in an efficient and logical fashion.

3. An estimate of construction costs of each of the projects. This is the key piece of information upon which the club can base its planning. At private clubs, we always suggest that the completed long range plan be incorporated into the club's bylaws. This virtually assures that all future boards, club presidents, and green committees follow the plan and precludes changes based on personal whims.

The implementation of the long range plan is something that should be given careful consideration. Player needs, tournaments, membership sales (in the case of private clubs), and local competition from other courses will all influence the time frame for implementation. Financial circumstances may dictate that the plan be phased in over as many as ten years. The downside to this approach is that the course can gain a reputation for always being under construction. Where extensive remodeling of the course is mandated, it's almost always to the golf course's benefit to complete the work in one or two years. Disruption to the course is minimized, which is particularly

Continued on next page

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important if the course hosts a large number of outside events. Moreover, the construction costs are likely to be more favorable, since there is economy in scale. In some cases parts of the plan can be implemented by the maintenance crew. This usually involves minor drainage repairs, tree removal or planting, or minor renovations to bunkers and tees. However, extensive remodeling, such as the reconstruction of all the greens or installation of a new irrigation system, will require an experienced golf course contractor.

The undertaking of a long range improvement plan requires a strong commitment from the golf course leadership if it's to succeed. In addition, the construction work as a result of the long range plan is not painless, causing disruption to the normal business routine. But these are the necessary things that must occur if the golf course is to realize its full potential over the ensuing years.

Bluegrass Control (Cont'd)

Multiple Application Sequences

"Prograss is a product that should be used in multiple application sequences for best effectiveness," explains Mahady. "Because Poa germinates in different flushes, the product should be used several times to assure control. So we looked at the number of applications that were most efficient in controlling annual bluegrass. The two prime periods of germination here are November through January and then March through May."

Using a rough area on the 14th hole, Mahady studied various rates and timing for two years, replicating all field trials four times to be statistically sound. Mahady sprayed only the left hand sides of the 10-foot-wide, 15-foot-long plots, so that each treatment plot contained an in-plot check. "We could always tell the true level of control with the multiples applications," he notes. "There were dynamic differences between treated and untreated areas."

Mahady's research results revealed that the one-gallon-per-acre rate of Prograss applied five times per year at specific intervals provided the best year-round control of annual bluegrass. Specific application timing was mid-October, late November, early March, mid-April and late May. Before his Prograss research began, the rough area contained about 23% annual bluegrass cover. Using the rates and sequence described, applications of Prograss resulted in 95% control of annual bluegrass.

Prograss Offers Valuable Features

"Prograss offers a number of features that are very valuable to golf course superintendents and other turf managers," Mahady

Bluegrass Control concludes on page 6

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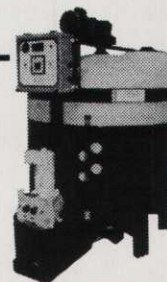
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