

USGA[®]

Green Section Record

REGIONAL UPDATE

August 21, 2020



While necessary, increased traffic from single rider carts adds considerable damage to the course.

GET PROACTIVE ON SINGLE RIDER CARTS

BY ADDISON BARDEN | AGRONOMIST, SOUTHEAST REGION

The need for social distancing to remain safe during COVID-19 appears to be heading well into the winter of 2020 and 2021. This means many courses will need to abide by single-rider cart recommendations through the peak winter golfing season. For many courses in the Southeast, this means thin turf will likely be common from increased cart traffic during periods of slow, warm-season turf growth.

This spring, thin turf was a common problem for many courses throughout the Southeast despite only experiencing increases in cart traffic during one or two months of slow bermudagrass growth. During winter, courses experience five to seven months of slowed growth, which means severe turf thinning could occur if cart traffic is not managed.

What can we do about it? No one wants to turn golfers away from the course, but golfers also do not want bare turf areas throughout the winter and next spring. To protect the turf this winter, all courses should develop a plan that has some flexibility built in to account for the weather.

Here are some ideas on managing single-rider cart traffic this winter:

- **Encourage golfers to walk and keep carts on the path as much as possible.** Explaining the purpose behind the request goes a long way. Some courses have found success in offering incentives – e.g., lower rates – to golfers to walk.
- **Plan to keep a certain percentage – typically around 50% - of weekly traffic on cart paths.** Some courses pick three to four days of the week to be paths only but make sure the days are busy enough to make an impact. Picking the slowest days will not do much.
- **Enact a 90-degree rule as much as possible.** This is an effective strategy, but it should not replace scenarios where cart path only rules should be enacted.
- **Communicate agronomic programs performed to counter the impact of traffic before they're performed.** Superintendents know extra aeration, use of ropes and stakes, and extra fertilizer applications are going to be performed in high traffic areas. Letting golfers know why they are being done before the season starts helps spread the word and reduce surprises.

Once the plan is finished, make sure it is shared with the golfers so there are no surprises at the first tee or on the course. The goal is to develop a strategy that will best suit your course. There are no perfect solutions when deciding how to reduce cart use and maintain healthy turf, but small adjustments and sacrifices can yield some very positive results.



For information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service Contact the Green Section Staff.

[Learn More](#)



SOUTHEAST REGION AGRONOMISTS:

Chris Hartwiger, Director, USGA Course Consulting Service, chartwiger@usga.org

Steve Kammerer, Ph.D., Regional Director, skammerer@usga.org

Addison Barden, Agronomist, abarden@usga.org

[Information on the USGA's Course Consulting Service](#)

[Contact the Green Section Staff](#)