

PARKS S-T-R-E-T-C-H TO MEET FIELD DEMAND

Park superintendents add fields while budgets and staff stay the same. Utility turf programs and old equipment may not be enough to keep fields in play.

By Bruce F. Shank, Executive Editor

Park superintendents are stretching resources to keep up with demand for playing fields according to the latest *Weeds Trees & Turf Landscape Management* survey. Meanwhile, budgets remain the same and equipment is doctored to keep it in use.

More than two-thirds of the respondents in the survey indicated their equipment budgets were not enough to buy the equipment needed to keep up with increased field use. Seventy percent said they had increased the number of fields to meet the demand for fields by sports leagues and taxpayers. Despite this, only 18 percent have had a budget increase and 27 percent have had to cut maintenance budgets. Staff size has stayed the same in two-thirds of the cases and decreased in 27 percent.

Stretching resources may be an understatement. The increased use of existing fields is exceeding the protection provided by utility turf management programs standard for parks.

The typical annual regimen of park sports field care is spring and fall fertilizer applications of 50-100 lbs. N/acre, aerification twice a year, overseeding worn areas in the fall, and a single application of a postemergence broadleaf herbicide in late spring. Mowing at 2½-inches on an eight-day cycle is common.

Dr. William Daniel of Purdue University terms 2 lbs. N/1,000 sq. ft./year (87 lbs./acre) a minimum diet for turf. Considering the wear sports fields receive, and that overseeding mixtures are often perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass, a minimum turf diet

might be impairing the ability of park turf to recover from injury. Daniel terms 4 lbs. N/1,000 sq. ft./year (174 lbs./acre/year) adequate for cool season lawns.

Tall fescues have a lower nutrient requirement than other turfgrasses and establish slower than ryegrass but faster than Kentucky bluegrass. Fertilization programs should match the turf species. Overseeding may alter the primary turfgrass on northern fields.

Park superintendents see the pressure from adult sports leagues as the leading factor in increased field use. Soccer and children's sports leagues tied for second. Women's sports was a close third.

League officials do perform some maintenance according to 40 percent of the park superintendents, but league fees do not encourage them to build more fields. Only ten percent said league fees help pay maintenance costs.

Despite the fact that the amount of work has increased and park staffs are staying the same or decreasing, less than ten percent of the park superintendents use outside contractors to perform some maintenance services. Daniel believes, however, that firms specializing in athletic field maintenance will be accepted by public agencies in the future as an alternative with the special knowledge and equipment required to maintain quality athletic fields.

Artificial turf is currently viewed by the park superintendents as a possible option to counteract extensive field use in certain cases. Nearly half thought it may be necessary if field use exceeds the ability of the turfgrass to recover. They

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Economy Athletic Field Care

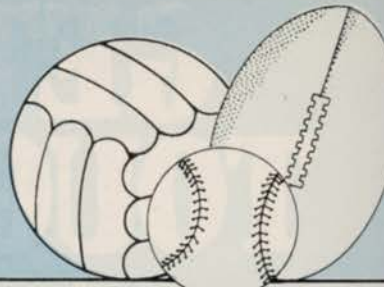
- Fertilize in early fall with 60 lbs. of nitrogen per field. Slow-release nitrogen formulation of 16-4-8 preferred.
- Water as needed with traveling irrigation equipment.
- Mow often at 2-inches.
- Overseed lightly before games with 5 lbs. seed per field.
- Mulch thin areas immediately after the last game of the season.
- Fertilize lightly in late winter or early spring with soluble nitrogen source.
- Apply preemergence herbicides after first mowing in spring.
- Apply postemergence herbicide to kill broadleaf weeds before mid-June.
- Increase cutting height in summer.

understand players don't like it as well and more than a third feel it should not be used as a substitute for natural turf, but they still see it practical for certain limited cases.

Surprisingly, park superintendents reported they manage more tennis courts than soccer fields. Baseball and softball fields are the most common athletic responsibility of the superintendents with 86 percent managing an average of 14 fields. Nearly 70 percent manage an average of 13 tennis courts. Two-thirds care for an average of 7 soccer fields. Football fields are the responsibility of 57 percent of the park superintendents with an average of 4 fields. Sixty percent are responsible for swimming pools with an average of 2.5 pools. Finally, less than a fifth care for golf courses.

The average acreage managed is 208 acres. The most common title is superintendent of parks and recre-

**Impact on Athletic Field Use
by Percent Responding**



	Great	Moderate	None
Women's Sports	48	48	4
Soccer	52	34	9
Children's Sports	55	45	0
Teenage Sports	41	62	0
Adult Sports	69	38	0

ation. The closer the individual in charge of fields is to the actual maintenance, the more knowledgeable he is. A set of national standards for park athletic fields could be a major support for park superintendents in combatting in-

tensive wear of athletic fields. We offer Dr. Daniel's standards here as an example.

It seems only sensible to spend a little more for natural field maintenance than a great deal more for an artificial surface. **WTT**

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