

**LANDSCAPE PROFILE**

**THE 'SUPER' SUPER**

It rains when it shouldn't. Equipment breaks down. Club members complain. The modern golf course superintendent faces problems from every direction.

by Jerry Roche, editor

**W**eather, turf and personnel: take your choice.

They're all problems today's golf course superintendent solves every day—or, at the very least, on a regular basis. They're three reasons why today's golf course "super" must be a "super" planner, organizer and executor.

The results of an exclusive WEEDS TREES & TURF survey reveal that unexpected weather conditions are the biggest thorns in the side of today's superintendents. When asked about "problem tasks" which they encounter, "coping with the weather" was listed on the reports of 56.5% of the respondents. And when asked about the challenges they face as individuals, a good portion cited weather problems.

"My greatest challenge is trying to maintain proper playing conditions under adverse weather conditions," wrote one respondent. Many of the

written comments came from superintendents of transition zone courses.

Personnel/labor was the most popular response to an open-ended (fill-in) question about the biggest maintenance problem. That is, employees—for one reason or another—simply are not doing their job well enough to suit many superintendents. Another question listed various problems supers might have; though "personnel" was not on the list, it received the most write-in votes.

"Managing people is the greatest challenge I face, be they summer workers or the club champion," noted one superintendent. "The turf can be managed with a proper budget, but people take a whole lot more."

Another agreed: "Dealing with both the people above you and the people below you is important. The

weather plays an important role in our job, but is a constant that can be dealt with. But working with people makes for an interesting profession."

And another: "My biggest problem is keeping the staff motivated. Toward the end of summer, everyone is 'grassed out:' sick of mowing, working on, and looking at grass. You really have to work to keep the crew motivated and create job enthusiasm."

**Other problems**

Other most-cited daily problems superintendents confront are, in order of importance: old equipment going bad, drainage (water) problems, too much traffic from golf spikes and golf cars, and irrigation system maintenance.

One super wrote: "My greatest challenge is convincing the golfing public that the spiked shoes they've been wearing for so many years are as detrimental to the greens as vandalism from carts, traffic, etc."

And the growing trend toward golf car rental doesn't help. According to the survey, 83.6% of the courses report an increase in golf car rental. Just 3.0% report decreases.

Superintendents' most difficult "problem tasks," after weather, are: turf maintenance (cited on 42.0% of the questionnaires), hazard maintenance (27.5%), dealing with members (26.1%), budget problems (21.7%), and tree/shrub maintenance (20.3%).

**A profile**


The 69 superintendents responding to the questionnaire have an average of 10.6 years experience, and have been at their current course an average of 9.7 years. Most (26.5%) come from the Midwest, followed by the Northeast (20.6%).

Most of the respondents work for private courses (47.8%), but nearly as many (43.5%) work for public courses. Just 8.7% identify themselves as working for daily fee or resort courses.

Almost three-quarters (73.9%) of the courses in the survey are 18 holes, 13.0% nine-hole, 5.8% are 27-hole, 4.3% are 36-hole, and 2.9% are more than 36 holes.

Courses are busier, too. They average 960 rounds per week: public courses 1,305 and private 657. Those figures represent an increase of 40%

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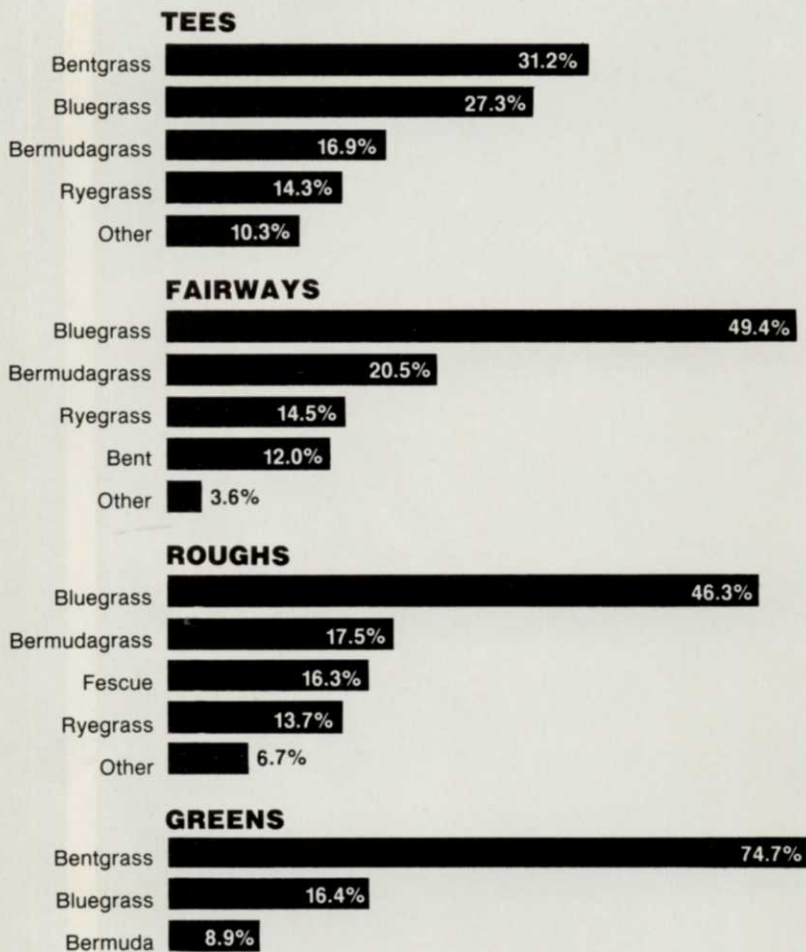
**WT&T SURVEY AVERAGES**

<b>Type of Course</b>	
Public ...	43.5%
Private ..	47.8%
Daily fee ..	5.8%
Resort ....	2.9%
<b>Number of holes</b>	
Nine .....	13.0%
Eighteen .....	73.9%
Twenty-seven .....	5.8%
Thirty-six .....	4.3%
More than 36 .....	3.0%
<b>Average number of rounds/week</b>	
	960
<b>Average maintenance budget</b>	
1985 .....	\$235,270
Projected 1986 .....	\$253,790
<b>Average crew size</b>	
Full-time, year-round .....	5.6
Full-time, peak season .....	10.4

<b>Length a superintendent</b> .....	10.6 years
<b>Length at current course</b> ...	9.7 years
<b>Geographical distribution</b>	
Northeast .....	20.6%
Southeast .....	16.2%
Midwest .....	26.5%
Southwest .....	8.8%
Plains/Mountains .....	16.2%
Far West .....	11.7%

**MOST COMMON TURFGRASSES OF GOLF COURSES**



budget for fungicides will be higher. But just 52.5% say that their insecticide budget will increase, indicating a recent trend toward a more controlled use of insecticides.

The sample of superintendents who responded to the WT&T survey are joiners: 83.8% belong to a local superintendent's association and an additional 67.6% belong to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. USGA Green Section membership is 35.3%. And 84.8% of the respondents have membership dues (in at least one organization) paid by the club.

**On the pulse**

It appears, from the results of the survey, that golf course

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superintendents have their finger on the pulse of the industry. When asked what challenges the industry itself faces, their answers match the problem areas most often cited by the GCSAA:

- rising maintenance costs,
- water availability,
- pesticide use,
- public relations,
- problems created by increased play,
- legislation not in the best interests of the industry, and
- turf research.

"The industry must find a way to provide golfers with the best possible conditions, but not overprice the product," wrote one respondent. "In other words, get back to basics."

Another noted: "Money and water are our greatest challenges, because in some areas we are running out of both."

So, clearly, the successful golf course superintendent must be more—much more—than just a devoted horticulturist or agronomist. He must be a "super"-man. **WT&T**

**PROBLEM DISEASES OF GOLF TURF**

(69 responses)

Disease	% respondents
Dollar spot	71.0
Brown patch	56.5
Snow molds	21.7
Fusarium diseases	14.5
Pythium blight	13.0
Anthracoise	11.6
Leaf spot	11.6
Others	17.4

over 1984 figures (reported by the National Golf Foundation and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America), and might be slightly high, but are nonetheless indicative of a trend toward increased play.

Average maintenance budget of the courses surveyed was \$235,270 in 1985 with a projected average of \$253,790 in 1986, an increase of 7.9%. The smallest budget was \$12,000, the largest \$900,000 (the latter expects a \$1.1 million budget in 1986).

Maintenance crews average 5.6 full-timers with 10.4 in peak season. Largest crew reported is 26.

Two-thirds of the respondents say their budget for herbicides is expected to increase in 1986; 62.9% say their budget for fertilizer will increase while 61.2% say their