

More U.S. golf courses using 'scouts' to monitor agronomic/pest conditions

■ Scouts are sprouting up on more and more U.S. golf courses.

No, these scouts don't start fires by rubbing sticks together. They don't sit around camp fires singing "95 Bottles of Beer on the Wall." These are turfgrass scouts. They observe and record agronomic and pest conditions on golf courses.

Increasingly, they're the advance guard of integrated pest management (IPM) programs that allow golf course superintendents to target and reduce pesticide use while keeping their courses in excellent playing condition.

These scouts must be experienced and educated in turfgrass. Increasingly, however, they must also be adept at gathering and then feeding information about weather, pest activity, soil conditions, etc. into computers. This data provides a day-to-day snapshot of the condition of courses. It also builds an historical record of each course.

The data, gleaned by these scouts, guides and justifies appropriate maintenance practices. In these times of more stringent economic and environmental accounting, the data also controls the proper, most effective use of chemicals.

"In a scouting program you really

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need to make a commitment to keeping rigorous records of what you're finding, particularly concerning pest activity," says Dr. Pat Vittum, University of Massachusetts. "That includes what you found, where you found it, how many you found, and what kind of damage you observed."

The scout does not have to be the course superintendent, but sometimes it is—particularly since many superintendents like to tour their courses daily anyway. Or the scout can be a trusted and knowledgeable assistant. In either case, the scout must develop, then commit to a plan to observe the golf course literally at the hands-and-knees level each day,

says Vittum.

"If you get into a scouting system where you're scouting regularly and you're beginning to notice the effect of weather and temperature conditions on pest activity, that will help you in predicting what's going to happen on the golf course throughout the rest of the year," says Vittum.

For those superintendents starting a planned scouting program, Vittum urges them to begin modestly, initially scouting maybe just the greens. They can expand the program as they become more comfortable with it.

A scout's activities can be as detailed as budget and time allow.

"The number of samples a scout can take has to be balanced between the cost of the time for taking them and the accuracy a superintendent demands to make the system work for them," says Vittum.

Dr. Vittum spoke about scouting at the Golf Course Superintendent's Association of American Convention in Anaheim this past November. (The GCSAA, at each annual convention, holds a one-day seminar of Scouting, Sampling and Monitoring Golf Course Pests. The next will be in Dallas, January 1994.)

—Ron Hall

Soil management program pays off for Falcon's Fire resort golf course

■ Falcon's Fire Golf Club in Osceola County, Fla. owes its reputation for "character" to a soil management program.

When the championship layout was designed by Rees Jones, certain perimeter mounding and elevation changes were built into each hole. Also factored into the construction process was an extensive soils management program which placed the right soils in the right places.

Newfield Interprises International, developers of Falcon's Fire and of Seralago, the 550-acre master planned resort on which the course is built, retained the services of Michael D. Slms & Associates geotechnical engineers.

"Over a million cubic yards of fill were

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moved, but the job wasn't just a case of placing any old dirt wherever it was needed," says Seralago project director Valerie Sewell.

"The tees and greens needed to be built to exacting standards of the USGA, and the entire course envelope received a two-foot layer of fill, even before any fill for contouring was deposited.

"In addition, all soils were screened for organic content, percolation quality and compaction. Only soils with the highest percolation quality were placed on the fairways."

Since opening, Falcon's Fire is earning a reputation of being able to play shortly after heavy rains while other courses in central Florida stay closed with water-logged fairways.