

Soaking for sodium

Weekly drenchings keep salt content low on greens at California coastal course.

by LESLEE JAQUETTE

Life is just about perfect at the Golf Club at Quail Lodge, near California's Carmel-by-the-Sea. The weather could be described as "posh," all year long, and not many of the residents work up a sweat, work-wise.

Dennis Kerr, however, sweats. Especially over salt water and Canada geese. Loads of sodium contained in water in four irrigation wells on the property, and a few hundred geese now call Quail Lodge home.

Neighbor golf course Pebble Beach Golf Club recently changed from using well water to reclaimed water. However Quail continues to

► "We basically flood the greens in order to stay away from sodium build-up," says Dennis Kerr.

▼ Drag nets brush in topdressing on one of Quail Lodge's newly-aerated greens.

irrigate its 130 acres from the local aquifer. According to Kerr, the sodium levels vary, and are a function of rainfall.

Three-way solution

If the rains stay away, Kerr and his staff combat salt by flushing the push-up greens weekly, aerifying and adding gypsum to help with leaching.

Kerr explains that since the old greens don't drain well; sodium build-up strangles the *poa annua* in the greens. If it rains in the early fall and then late in March, the irrigation season will be shortened, and the greens keepers are ahead of the game. In lieu of rebuilding the greens to PGA standards, Kerr's team maintains a regimen of

deep soaking.

"We soak to the point of runoff," says Kerr, as he looks out over the manicured course that is built into a lovely, older housing development.

"We soak to leach. We basically flood the greens in order to stay away from sodium build-up."

The crew soaks the greens about once a week and hand waters from the best of the wells on an as-needed basis, all the while being careful to observe the turf's conditions, and take soil samples. The Toro 660 heads Kerr uses pump 3,450 gallons per hour through the greens.

To enhance the leaching and gradually improve the greens' composition, Kerr aerifies four times a year. During the first part of June and again in early August, his crew deep tines the greens up to 10 inches in depth. These deep punctures facilitate the entire flow process, allowing the water and air to move through the dirt. Kerr admits that it's fairly risky to deep tine during the heat of summer, but if they take good care, the aerification works out. Two other times during the year, the crew does a normal aerification to about four inches deep.

Kerr often enlists the help of the aeration specialists at West Coast Greens of Sacramento, who Verti-Drain all the greens in one day. Kerr would like to purchase his own Verti-Drain unit to keep up the aerification schedule on greens and fairways.

Gypsum helps leaching

The Quail crew makes liberal applications of gypsum to help with the leaching. In an attempt to flush out the salts left from irrigation, the crew applies from 400 to 600 pounds of gypsum per green per year. They usually apply it in 100 pound lots, five to six times per year, says Kerr.

"You can't see the effect of gypsum," says Kerr. "It's ongoing, and it could take years, but it all helps improve the soil." □

