

# Course mops up after winter floods

*Superintendent Rick McDow estimates a 350-hour clean up and repair job needed to get Ballinger back in shape.*

by LESLEE JAQUETTE

If the Ballinger Park Municipal Golf Course were a bathtub, it would have the world's biggest ring, from flood waters that covered the course in December.

Included among the flotsam and jetsam floating along what

used to be fairways are pop cans, a soccer ball, railroad ties, cedar logs, four rowing skiffs that were lifted from a shoreline, and a 30-foot boat dock.

The damage done to this nine-hole public golf course located 13 miles north of Seattle on Lake Ballinger, is extensive. Superintendent Rick

McDow estimates more than two-thirds of the 35-acre course was covered for several days in late December/early January, in what looks like a tidal slosh.

McDow and assistant superintendent Andrew Watters estimate the flood had left twice as much damage than any they have seen in 12 years. Beyond dozens of logs, railroad ties, docks and assorted junk, the flood took out five of six bridges on the course.

Situated in park lands adjacent to the lake, the course sits at an elevation of 280 feet. With two recent snowstorms and record-breaking rainfall, the lake rose more than six feet to reach within a few feet of the pro shop.

During the rainy months, guests often play while wearing rubber boots, and only the two holes closest to the lake become saturated. This year, every hole on the course had some standing water around it.

## Monumental clean up

The damage is great and the clean up is going to take weeks. A lower budget doesn't help either.

For starters, McDow estimates the clean up will take a minimum of 300 man hours with an additional 50 spent to replace the five lost bridges. But is there more rain to come? McDow thinks so.

**More than 100 cedars and fir trees will have to be removed from Ballinger Park.**

Seattle's rainfall passed the 52-inch mark in 1996, which is 15 inches above average for a year, and McDow sees no reason to believe the monsoons will abate just as winter begins.

The prognosis for the repair time—as of mid-January—was that the course would have to remain closed till March.

McDow recalls that during the course's best year—1987, a drought year—61,000 rounds were played. In comparison, wet 1996 saw only 35,000 rounds. Given the way 1997 has roared in, McDow anticipates an all-time low for rounds played.

## Lost revenue, lost trees

Beyond increased labor needs and lost revenue, at least 100 cedar and fir trees will probably die and have to be removed as a result of the flood.

McDow explains that while the cedars can withstand "wet feet" every now and then, they can't endure it for days at a time, and the firs can't tolerate flooding at all. Some of these trees are 15 years old and worth thousands.

Shaking his head as if he's losing good friends, McDow says the cost is inestimable. Ironically, he notes that the 50 or so enormous, large leaf poplars on the course will survive just fine.

"Poplars are the dirtiest, filthiest tree you could have on a course, but, fortunately, nothing can kill them."



## Clean-up strategy for wet, wet turf

- ▶ Focus the budget dollars on survival. Get the course clean and safe.
- ▶ Expect lots of hand work, due to high saturation.
- ▶ Plan to bring in heavy equipment in April, June at the latest.
- ▶ Logs, timbers, docks will have to be sawed into manageable pieces and carried to trucks.
- ▶ Ryegrass will have to be brought in well in excess of the usual 500 pounds used in a year.
- ▶ Fungicide applications on greens and tee boxes will have to go beyond the usual two per year applications.

L.J.



Andrew Watters, left, and Rick McDow found some dry ground to walk as they surveyed Ballinger's flood damage.

### Pest damage mounts

Crows, Canada geese and mallard ducks are expected to do more damage. Crows are the worst, says McDow.

"The critters will chew up this turf like crazy. Going after insect larvae, they will peck the

course to death."

Mallards dive to chew up thousands of tufts of turf, pieces of which will be seen floating in the receding lake.

Mud, water, pine needles, a variety of plant and human crud edge the course like a

dozen ugly bathtub rings.

"Floods are all a part of the game," says McDow. "Still, it's hard to accept, because, taken in conjunction with our ailing equipment and lost revenue, it

makes everything snowball downhill." □

—The author is a writer/photographer based in Edmonds, Wash. Photos by Leslee Jaquette

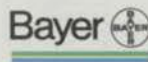
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