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Haymaker Golf Course Makes Environmental Sustainability a Priority

At the USGA 1994 annual meeting held in Scottsdale, Arizona, outgoing President Stuart Bloch was reported to have said, "The player, club, and ball have always been essential elements to the integrity of the golf equation. Our challenge today is to tackle the fourth element of that equation: the environment. Properly mastering the environmental element may be the USGA's most important contribution to preserving the future of golf."

Steamboat Springs, CO (April 8, 2009) - Across the US, golf course development and management have come a long way toward improving land stewardship. Golf courses were once perceived by environmental activists as having a major negative impact on the environment. The USGA has made it one of their goals to reverse that trend. Today's astute golf course superintendents have implemented a plethora of best management practices, incorporating both complex science and common sense. The result - improved water quality in surrounding areas, reduced waste, preservation of important wildlife habitat, water conservation techniques, improved chemical, fertilizer and pesticide management, and energy conservation.

In Steamboat Springs, Colorado, the City owned and operated Haymaker Golf Course is an exemplary example of how sustainable practices can be incorporated into daily activities. Haymaker received Audubon International Signature Certification in 2000, the first course to do so in the state. "We pride ourselves in minimizing the amount of fertilizers and pesticides we use, being more friendly to the environment, yet without sacrificing the quality of the playing surface," said Bill Whelihan, Golf Course Superintendent.

It is a delicate balance between pleasing the very demanding golf clientele and ensuring that the integrity of the environment and preservation of the surrounding agricultural heritage is upheld. "Bill and his team are committed to continually improving the already aggressive sustainability features that have been implemented at the course," commented Lyn Halliday, President of Environmental Solutions Unltd, an environmental consulting firm in the area. "The comprehensive nature of the program at Haymaker is very impressive."

A cornerstone of the Haymaker program is preservation of the natural habitat. In fact, wetlands were added during course development and species diversity has been improving over the years. The more perceptive golfers enjoy the serenity of the native grassland landscape while viewing

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bald eagles, great blue herons, a variety of water fowl as well as many migrant birds and an occasional endangered species overhead. “The surroundings help me relax and focus on the game,” said Harry Dabagian, a long term golfer. “It is a place of great beauty.”

You might call Bill’s approach micro-managing and, in fact, this is one of the newer more progressive methods used by golf courses to reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers while also conserving water and energy. According to Whelihan, water usage was reduced by an estimated 29% annually through better irrigation management practices. There is also a water monitoring program in place to ensure that practices used to protect water quality are performing properly.

Recycling has also been a focus of the course managers. “We still have some educating to do out on the course, but the staff is dedicated to sorting out recyclables and delivering them to the recycling center,” said Hank Franks, Head Golf Professional. “Now that we have proven success in our sustainable practices, we have embarked on an outreach program to get our message out to the community and to golf course users.”

For the serious golfer, the sustainability efforts of the Haymaker may be transparent. But whether in front of or behind the scenes, sustainable practices are becoming more mainstream, with innovations like those in place at Haymaker providing the model. The negative impact golf may have had on the environment in the past has caused the USGA and others to spend countless energy and dollars on research resulting in improved practices and products. Many golf publications have also discovered the importance of the message.

Next time you play the fabulous and challenging Haymaker Golf course, take a moment to listen for the inspiring call of the Bald Eagle flying overhead. Who knows, it may even improve your putting!

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