



—Scientific Note—

The Birds, the Bees, the Turf, and the Trees: Improving the Sustainability of Golf Courses with Wildlife Habitat Enhancements

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It is estimated that the population of Florida will reach 33.7 million people by the year 2070 with even more development likely to sprawl into the state's agricultural and natural lands. With urban sprawl proliferating, Florida land is shrinking, and it seems houses and development are growing faster than oranges and turfgrass. And wildlife is taking a major hit from urban sprawl. The diverse habitats across Florida, from the Panhandle down to the Keys, are home to an impressive amount of wildlife—from black bears, butterflies, deer, to panthers and bobcats, armadillos and turtles and, of course, alligators, to the water birds along the riverbanks and shorelines of Florida's magnificent coasts. They need a place for shelter, food and water, and golf courses are becoming havens for wildlife in the face of urban sprawl. If managed carefully, golf courses can represent a compatible land for the state's native wildlife and help preserve the biodiversity of Florida's quickly shrinking lands. In addition, golf course superintendents can receive certification for wildlife conservation efforts through Audubon International and potentially demand higher greens fees than those without such certification. Enhanced wildflower habitats have shown to increase pollinator populations and other beneficial insects that help with pest management. Therefore, golf courses can improve their sustainability by implementing

wildlife habitat enhancements in out-of-play areas, landscaping with native trees and vegetation, encouraging wetland areas and minimizing chemical applications.

Realizing the need for wildlife conservation and the opportunity for golf course superintendents, I created a program objective to improve the sustainability of golf courses through education and on-course wildlife habitat enhancements.

To date, I have delivered five presentations and one workshop on the topic, reaching 243 turf managers. Post-class survey results (n = 199) indicate a knowledge increase in the benefits and strategies for wildlife conservation and an increased intent to adopt at least one of the strategies presented. I also assisted golf course superintendents with pollinator and blue-bird habitat enhancement projects and littoral zone plant modification projects on several golf course ponds. As a result, three Brevard County golf courses received Audubon International certification for their conservation efforts in 2020–21.

This program is ongoing and adaptable to other counties in Florida. Adoption of wildlife conservation on golf courses in other counties would expand and strengthen the wildlife corridors across the state.

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