

What's Your Story?

Three frogs were sitting on a log. Three of them decided to jump into the pond. How many frogs were left sitting on the log?

We'll get back to the frogs in a minute, but first let's look at the state of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP). The ACSP was born in 1991 when a few hundred golf courses stepped forward to participate in the fledgling environmental education and certification program. With generous funding provided by the USGA, Audubon International crafted a program to address golf's environmental concerns and take advantage of its environmental opportunities. Over the years, with feedback from many industry leaders, the program has matured, the certification criteria tightened, the certification process streamlined, and processes to measure program results developed.

Measuring program results has been one of the most exciting developments of the program, because the general public, government agencies, and environmental community look at numbers and results to evaluate how good golf is for the environment. Certification materials become a way for each member to tell their environmental story, and the ACSP has become a storytelling device for the golf industry. What story are we telling?

Currently there are over 2,250 golf courses in 29 countries registered in the ACSP. Through the program, over 1800 golf courses have developed an environmental plan, over 975 have documented their efforts to conserve water, over 825 have their IPM plan documented, and over 750 have an outreach and education program in place. Over 225 golf courses were denied certification in water quality management, mostly due to poor wash pad or mix/load setups. These denials led to changes that improved maintenance facilities and reduced risk.

Then there are the environmental results. Out of all ACSP members, not just certified golf courses, 69% have decreased water use, with an average savings of 1.9 million gallons/year/course. 89% improved cultural control methods and 92% are using pesticides with a lower toxicity level. 80% have decreased turfgrass, with an average increase in wildlife habitat of 22 acres per golf course. According to the Golf Course Environmental Profile, on average 16% of golf courses are comprised of native/natural/non-mown areas compared to an average of 40% on Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary golf courses.

There are also business benefits. According to a 2006 poll of golf course superintendents, nearly half of all golf courses spend over \$100,000 per year on chemical control products, while another quarter spend between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year. By focusing on cultural practices and Integrated Pest Management programs, many courses are dramatically reducing chemical use and thus saving money. Based on preliminary evidence from ACSP golf members, it's clear that the savings can be significant—from a few thousand dollars to over \$50,000 saved in chemical costs annually. Members have also reported lower taxes, reduced risk, and improved community relations.

As far as improved community relations go, over 500 conservation organizations have been involved with ACSP members through their resource advisory group. That's over 500 organizations that may have had an opinion about golf courses that has been changed.

Then there are the personal stories. Each course develops a case study prior to certification. Many of these end up on the Environmental Institute for Golf website, in magazines and presentations, and as fodder for stories in local newspapers.

To date, 13% of all the golf courses in the United States are involved in the ACSP or an Audubon Signature Program. Four percent have been certified through one of the programs. We are proud of those numbers, having achieved them without benefit of a sales team or PR department. Yet, the question I receive when talking about the program to reporters, government officials, and environmental organizations is “why are the numbers so low?” It is a good question that I now turn over to you. There's strength in numbers, so the more courses are involved, the stronger the results for the golf industry as a whole.

Within the Pacific Northwest, there is a mixed bag of participation. Washington runs along the national average, with 14% participating and 4% certified. Idaho lags behind with 8% participating and 3% certified. Oregon is gunning for the top spot in the nation with 25% participating and 10% certified. As a whole, the Oregon golf industry is in a much better position to tell its story than its sister states. The documentation to prove that golf courses are community environmental assets exists through ACSP participation. How much better it would be if the entire region were to be able to tell their story collectively? Doubling ACSP membership in the Pacific Northwest would lead to approximately 50 new press releases, 25 more displays, and 25 more contacts with at least one community/environmental organization touting golf course efforts towards environmental sustainability. If all existing members were to become certified, that would lead to 124

new press releases, 62 new displays, and 62 new contacts with at least outside organization
- all telling the story of how golf courses can benefit the environment.

And now back to the frogs. How many frogs were left on the log? All three. Although they had decided to jump, they didn't take action. I speak to people all the time that intend to join the program - someday. Make someday today. Jump into the pond, join the program, and let Audubon International help you tell your story.

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