

Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses

Audubon International



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Objectives:

Through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, Audubon International strives to:

- 1. Enhance wildlife habitats and sustainable resource management efforts on golf courses by providing ecologically sound management advice to golf course superintendents.*
- 2. Document and recognize golf courses as a valuable stakeholder in environmental conservation.*
- 3. Educate the general public about the benefits golf courses play relative to the environment and wildlife in communities worldwide.*

Being a responsible environmental manager is a key part of running a successful golf course, but like many people, superintendents may not always have the time or expertise to investigate and plan environmental strategies suited to their golf course. An effective environmental management system can result in reduced insurance premiums, as well as reduced costs for energy, water, pesticides, fertilizers, equipment wear, and labor. Audubon International works with golf course superintendents by providing educational assistance to create an environmental management system.

The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses is an award-winning education program of Audubon International. Through a plan-do-check-act approach, the program helps golf courses superintendents protect the environment and preserve the natural heritage of the game of golf. After implementing ecologically sound land management and sustainable natural resource techniques, golf courses are eligible for certification.

Written and photographic documentation is required to achieve certification. On-site verification by a qualified third party is also required prior to certification. Recertification is required every two years to ensure that program members continue to uphold certification standards. Members that do not submit the appropriate documentation or are no longer meeting program requirements are decertified.

In 2012, 96 joined the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, bringing the total number of active member golf courses to 1,991. Program members hail from 31 countries, although the majority (1,711) are from

Dan Hill, Birnamwood Golf Course Superintendent, speaking to a group of young volunteers at a "Live Green Environmental Education Course Improvement Day" about how they can be good environmental citizens on and off the golf course. Photo Credit: Peter Wong Photography 2012.



the United States. Audubon International designated 842 golf courses as certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries and awarded 466 certificates of achievement in the areas of Environmental Planning (109), Wildlife and Habitat Management (74), Chemical Use Reduction and Safety Water Conservation (65), Water Quality Management (64), and Outreach and Education (66).

Audubon International is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to delivering high-quality environmental education and using incentive-based approaches to implement sustainable natural resource management in all places people live, work, and play. The organization, which has been in existence for over 25 years, works with a wide range of interested partners, including golf courses, developers, agriculture producers, small businesses, large corporations, academic institutions, fellow not-for-profits,

The newly planted rain garden at the Overland Park Golf Club increases the course aesthetics with native flowers and grasses while also reducing irrigation costs. Rain barrels are an excellent way to collect rainwater for later use.



community associations, local governments, and state and federal agencies. Through education, planning, technical assistance, and recognition, Audubon International facilitates the implementation of natural resource management practices that ensure land, water, wildlife, and other natural resources are sustainably used and conserved. Utilizing a set of award-winning environmental education and certification programs, Audubon International is able to positively impact environmental health at multiple geographic scales, including individual properties, communities, and ecoregions.

After realizing that they had used 85,000 individual water bottles in one year, The Roaring Fork Club in Basalt, CO decided to eliminate the sale and consumption of bottles to help reduce their global impact. They eliminated all water bottle cooler stations and reinstated tap water cooler stations with cone paper cups or bio-degradable (corn) plastic cups. It costs \$22,000 per year to maintain the water coolers, which is substantially lower than the \$34,000 per year purchase price of bottled water, saving \$12,000 per year.



Eastern Bluebird populations are alive and well at many Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program member golf courses. Preferring to live in open grassy spaces, golf courses provide premier habitat for bluebirds.



Summary Points

Selected Economic benefits taken from 2011 program member survey:

- 52% of respondents have reduced water costs
- 66% of respondents have reduced fertilizer costs
- 70% of respondents have reduced pesticide costs
- 44% of respondents have reduced fuel costs
- 51% of respondents have reduced waste management costs

Selected Social benefits taken from 2011 program member survey:

- The average program member has 25 community volunteers assisting with conservation efforts.
- The average program member has 4 local community organizations assisting with their environmental program.
- The average member is working with 6 school or other educational groups.

Selected Environmental benefits taken from 2011 program member survey:

- 69% of respondents have improved irrigation systems
- 89% of respondents have increased shoreline mowing heights to slow and filter runoff
- The average member has reduced the acreage to which pesticides are applied by 15 acres
- 96% of respondents are using lower toxicity pesticides
- 59% of respondents have natural vegetation around all shorelines