



Greening Golf Courses: Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Certification Program

Factsheet, July 2013. By Jared Ellenor

Golfing is a great way to get together with friends, escape the city, and enjoy the outdoors. Typically constructed in scenic landscapes, many in lake watersheds, first appearances suggest golf courses preserve terrestrial and aquatic habitat however they may have significant environmental impacts. The pursuit of weed free, green fairways can lead to excessive fertilization, chemical treatment, and water consumption, which can result in the eutrophication of water bodies and an overall degradation of water quality in the region. The inclusion of challenging and aesthetically pleasing water hazards may result in the partial or complete removal of riparian zones along streams or ponds, resulting in the degradation or complete loss of significant habitat for birds and amphibians.

But are there differences in practices between courses? Yes - there are courses in Alberta that are striving to reduce their impacts.

One way to quickly tell if a golf course is environmentally conscious is by asking if they have an environmental certification through a program such as the [Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program](#). Created by Audubon International, and reaching over 2300 golf courses in three-dozen countries. In order to achieve certification a golf course must meet environmental management standards, providing proof of development, implementation and documentation of environmental management practices in 6 key areas, including:

- Environmental Planning
- Wildlife and Habitat Management
- Chemical Use Reduction and Safety
- Water Conservation
- Water Quality Management
- Outreach and Education

The overall goal of the program is to increase the ecological and environmental knowledge of the superintendent and course maintenance staff, resulting in improved management practices and reduced environmental impacts. For instance, plant communities, bird and mammal species, and core habitats for endangered or threatened species are identified on the course, leading to improved habitat protection and biodiversity conservation. Best management practices for chemical treatments aim to

reduce the potential for contamination of ground and surface water by employing proper equipment, techniques and procedures. Chemical application is avoided during high winds or prior to storm events, and no spray zones are established around water features. Fertilizer application is based on the results of soil tests, which provides information such as soil structure, nutrient levels and organic content.

For water quality management certification the golf course is required to prioritize the protection of water quality, implement best management practices, and routinely monitor water bodies. It is recommended that monitoring is conducted at least once a year and may include parameters such as nitrogen, total phosphorus, pH and dissolved oxygen. Best management practices include environmentally sensitive plant management techniques near water features in an attempt to minimize chemical and nutrient input, raising mowing heights along in play shorelines to slow and filter runoff, and eliminating/mitigating erosion along water bodies.

With proper education and implementation of best management practices a golf course can reduce environmental impacts and become an active environmental steward within the community. There are currently 87 golf courses in Canada that hold an ACSP certification, 17 of which are found in Alberta (and listed below). Support environmental conservation and stewardship by golfing at an Audubon Certified course, or encouraging your local course to join the program.

Course (as of July 2013)	Location
Calgary Golf and Country Club	Calgary
Country Hills Golf Club	Calgary
D'Arcy Ranch Golf Club	Okotoks
Earl Grey Golf Club	Calgary
Glencoe Golf and Country Club	Calgary
Highwood Golf and Country Club	High River
Innisfail Golf Club	Innisfail
Lethbridge Country Club	Lethbridge
Olds Central Highlands Golf Course	Olds
Priddis Greens Golf and Country Club	Priddis
Silvertip Resort	Canmore
Stewart Creek Golf & Country Club	Canmore
The Fairmont Banff Springs Golf Course	Banff
The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge Golf Course	Jasper
Turner Valley Golf and Country Club	Turner Valley
Willow Park Golf and Country Club	Calgary
Woodside Golf Course	Airdrie

** Royal Mayfair in Edmonton is working towards certification.