

What is the Chechessee Creek Club Land Management Plan?



PURPOSE OF THE LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

A golf course designed to be respectful of the environment doesn't just happen. It takes planning, collaboration, supervision and cooperation of everyone involved from the time an idea is put on paper to opening day and beyond. The developer, designers, contractors and maintenance personnel must all support the notion of minimizing the impacts to the site, and complementing or enhancing the site's natural features. They should all assume the mind set of environmentalists.

For a golf course to be considered environmentally sound, its maintenance practices should be judged by the effect it has on the ecosystem and conversely how the surrounding open spaces are maintained, affecting the visual quality of and access to sunlight and airflow to maintain healthy turf on the course over time.

The Land Management Plan is documented in a binder. The purpose of the Land Management Plan binder is two-fold. The first purpose is to be a *working tool* for the Chechessee Creek Club staff. It serves as our "collective" memory of why decisions were made to keep us all working toward the same goals. It's a scrapbook, rather than a polished publication. Also, it is a way to organize references for the basis of land management decisions.

The second purpose is to explore and report how the Chechessee Creek Club can be used most effectively as a research/demonstration site to promote best environmental management practices on other golf courses. This includes demonstrating the process that a club can use to conduct a self-evaluation of its own course. Key elements of this process are learning to ask the right questions, finding answers to these questions, and involving Club personnel in the implementation of proposed solutions.

A copy of this binder is available for review at the Chechessee Creek Clubhouse and Club Office or can be purchased for the cost of reproduction. It describes what is being done at Chechessee under the following 15 management categories: cottage sites, course design preservation, environmental education, fertilization, grass, integrated pest management, marsh edges, open spaces, ponds, road r.o.w.'s, trees, water use, water quality, wetlands and wildlife/biology monitoring.

PROCESS

The steps used at Chechessee Creek Club for a land management evaluation was patterned after the traditional land planning method, following these steps:

1. *Understanding the Master Plan* - What is the vision? Direction is given to land management decisions by understanding and defining what the place is aspiring to be, how it's meant to function, who it will serve, what influenced the course routing and what were the environmental opportunities and constraints. This was the starting point for defining the goals and objectives for the Land Management Plan that reinforces the expression of the vision.
2. *Defining Goals & Objectives* - The first draft of the goals and objectives arise from the master plan vision. They are revisited and refined regularly as the land management plan is developed and revised. Each goal has quantifiable objectives to put the goal into practice.
3. *Site Inventory* - Mapping of key environmental features. These include habitat types in open space, protected wetlands and any unique biological/cultural features that help make the site special. The site inventory map depicts the ecological landscape of the site - both in terms of how it fits into the regional ecological landscape, and the patterns of habitat distribution on the site.
4. *Site Analysis* - Identified which areas on the site have the potential to address specific goals/objectives. This analysis was used to create a map that provides spatial information on the implementation of specific objectives. For example, if an objective is management for a specific species (e.g. fox squirrel), the site analysis would identify habitats suitable for that species.
5. *Management Recommendations* - A multi-disciplinary land management team has been organized including in-house professionals/managers and outside consultants. This team meets annually to review current conditions. The purpose of the annual meeting is (1) to assess effectiveness of the previous year's recommendations, (2) identify issues raised by the site analysis, (3) recommend management practices to make improvements.
6. *Implementation of Goals* - During the annual land management meeting, recommendations are given. After the meeting, the club management determines related expenses and then sets priorities based on available funds.

LAND MANAGEMENT GOALS

The following is a summary of the goals for Chechessee Creek Club that help us keep a clear vision of what we hope to accomplish with the land management plan.

1. To be an example of environmental best management practices for golf courses.
2. To be an experimental site for evaluating current assumptions about environmental best management practices for golf courses.
3. To share what we learn with others so that environmentally sensitive development is promoted.
4. To preserve and strengthen the sense of place as a classic course in a Lowcountry rural setting.
5. To be good environmental neighbors in Beaufort County by developing outreach programs through a partnership with the Low Country Institute (LCI).

ACTIVITIES

The goals are put into action. Over the last three years Chechessee Creek Club has been implementing its land management plan. An example of what has been done to date includes:

- The expansion of eye-catching drifts of tall native grasses along the golf course and throughways at Chechessee. Not only are they beautiful but based on our on site research they serve as an important seed source and cover for birds. Some of the patches were purchased plants, others were areas where a few grasses existed and have been tended so they spread. As these areas have grown they have been a source for transplant stock for other areas on the property.
- Prescribe burns, tree and thicket thinning, discing, seeding, mowing, tree root pruning are keeping the out of play areas biologically diverse and maintaining sufficient air flow and sunlight on the golf course to maintain healthy turf.
- Water use continues to decrease as the course matures. Minimizing the use of this precious resource reflects the benefits of our experiments with using low water demanding coastal bermuda for the rough and the use of wetting agents. It is also the result of having a zoned irrigation system and the practice of hand watering.
- Annual GIS photography and mapping to record landscape changes.
- Data base of application quantities of pesticides, fertilizers and water use.
- Hosting a University of South Carolina graduate student's water quality study regarding the effectiveness of retention ponds vs. grassed swales in filtering surface water run-off. It began in 2001 and is to be completed in 2004.
- Environmental education through articles in the club newsletter, a display at the clubhouse about environmental and cultural features of the property, guided interpretative walks for members and staff, and documenting our actions and results in the land management binder.
- Studies have included breeding birds, bluebirds, fox squirrels, painted bunting, botanical species and a species list of butterflies, dragonflies and reptiles. The property has 30 bluebird boxes, 2 purple martin houses, bird feeders and fields and thickets that have been created or maintained to host our feathered friends. The breeding bird surveys began during golf course construction and have continued to present. They have indicated an increase in the number and diversity of species and are indicators of quality upland habitat. The number of observed bluebirds, painted buntings and fox squirrels has also increased.