

Golf in recreational land use has been common in the British Isles since the 1400s and made its debut on North American soil in the late 19th century. While perceptions are changing, opinions persist that the golf industry is disconnected from environmental responsibility. Given the unique relationship to the environment, golf is inextricably linked to environmental stewardship.

Golf's sustainability is essential to its health. The most obvious sustainable aspects of the game are the physical qualities that must be present for it to be enjoyable-sensitivity to the surrounding countryside and appropriateness of setting; routing that takes into account naturally occurring land forms, wind and sun; strategic hole design to provide challenges for the expert golfer and grace for the novice; and the difficult-to-quantify "pleasant walk in the park" test. Any golf course that fails on these traits can't be sustained.

Sustainability, though, goes beyond aesthetics, particularly given Florida's sensitive ecosystem and regulatory climate. A well-conceived golf course can provide valuable benefits for communities that go far beyond its boundaries. Intelligent integration of golf courses can improve storm water management and water quality, can act as a buffer agent for sensitive lands or improve degraded landscapes. The complexity of today's environmental concerns increasingly demand that development move beyond simplistic approaches of site engineering and explore opportunities for sustainable initiatives. Golf offers that solution.

Many sites available for golf present challenges for development. Some sites are damaged due to agricultural deterioration, landfills or hazardous waste disposal. Other sites rest in or near environmentally-sensitive areas, such as wetlands, or closely-monitored water sheds. Many older golf courses calling for renovation have more stringent environmental regulatory requirements that require enhanced drainage management, water quality and quantity restrictions, plant and animal habitat protection and other new restrictions not in place during the original development. Today's golf course development and renovation must take these new challenges into account to achieve sustainability. More sophisticated and adaptable irrigation systems and turf varieties that require less water support sustainability, as do development monitoring programs offered through groups like Audubon International.

Sensitive and restrictive sites pose daunting challenges, but golf can also provide solutions for site enhancement. Many municipalities face storm water runoff and management issues due to ever-increasing impermeable development, and golf courses can provide relief from consequential flooding. Threats to the supply of clean water can be mitigated by the purification qualities offered by the green space a golf course provides. Wildlife and plants pushed out of their habitats by development can be offered sanctuary in golf's quiet. And, the recreational opportunities offered by golf are apparent.