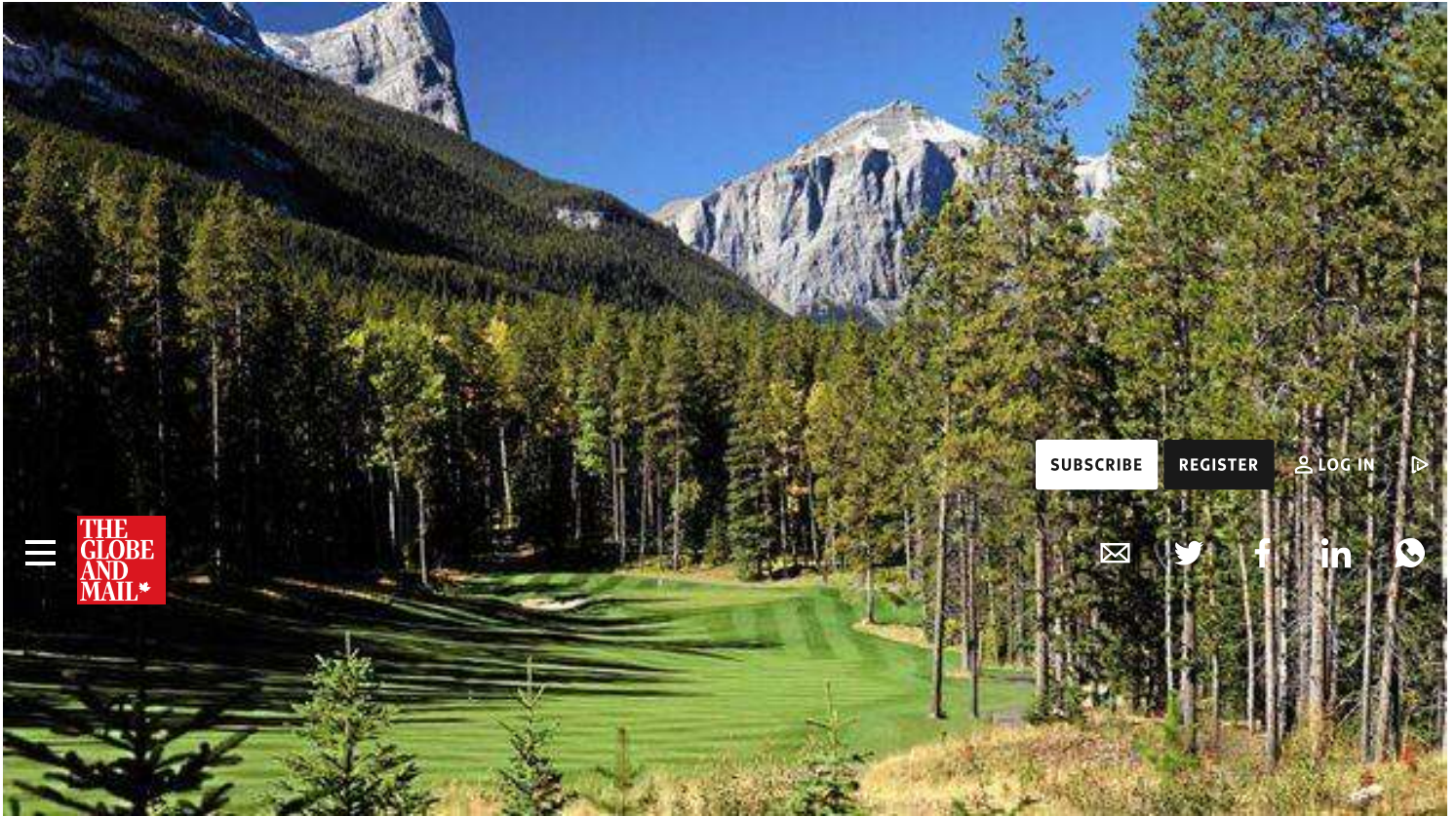


## Canadian courses go green



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Once ranked alongside the razing of rain forests as an environmentally hostile activity, golf has embraced the green movement with the zeal of the converted.

All across Canada, courses are dramatically cutting back on the use of water and pesticides, welcoming home birds and animals once regarded as pests, restocking ponds with indigenous fish and coming up with ingenious initiatives to transform the image of a sport long under attack by environmentalists.

Here's a look at how four top Canadian public courses are going green with a passion.

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### TEES WITH BEES

commitment.

"The honey bee population is under threat almost everywhere," says Ray Pineau, superintendent of the acclaimed Tom McBroom-designed layout in Baddeck. "If we could successfully make a home for the colony here on the course, people would see that we're managing our environment in a safe and responsible way."

Lured by a local beekeeper to a permanent man-made hive within sight of the driving range, the bees now produce 40 pounds of honey yearly.

Like most progressive Canadian courses, Bell Bay is a certified member of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System, an international program that encourages golf courses and other properties to develop an environmental plan and then reach targets in a variety of areas - including wildlife and habitat management, insect control, water conservation and public outreach.

"The bee colony has definitely become our trademark project," Pineau says. "Our wildflowers have never looked so healthy and the honey our bees produce is absolutely delicious."



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Few Canadian courses have had their green credentials as rigorously scrutinized as Stewart Creek Golf and Country Club, a high-end Rocky Mountain layout situated in the environmentally sensitive Bow Valley corridor near Canmore.

"Our biggest challenge has been to minimize our impact on the grizzlies, wolves, cougars and other wildlife that use this as a migration route," superintendent Sean Kjemhus says.

"I think we've won over a lot of critics who were convinced a golf course didn't belong here."

Designed by Gary Browning, a Calgary-based architect with a graduate degree in environmental planning, Stewart Creek was considered a model of low-impact design when it opened in 2000. Wildlife movement corridors were incorporated into the layout, as were native grasses to provide forage for migrating animals.

As many as nine holes are closed whenever a bear is on site, both for the protection of golfers and to prevent the animal from becoming desensitized to human contact. Elk are also given a wide berth, particularly during the autumn rut.

But the views at Stewart Creek are awe-inspiring even from an environmentally approved safe distance.

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"I remember a group of golfers from Texas staring wide-eyed as a bear kept comically slapping a flagstick on one of our greens," Kjemhus says. "They said it was the highlight of their trip to Canada."

## **CRAVINGS AT CLEAR LAKE**

As distinct as the forest scents of pine and cedar, there's often a strong - and environmentally beneficial - whiff of French fries in the air at Manitoba's Clear Lake Golf Course.

Riding Mountain National Park, about 95 kilometres north of Brandon, into one of the most environmentally progressive courses in Canada.

"Working everyday in the beauty of a national parkland is both inspiring and a responsibility," superintendent Greg Holden says. "When we spot a problem, we always try to fix it in an ecologically soft way."

A need to conserve groundwater led to a switch to compost toilets, which in turn provided a source of natural fertilizer. And the use of cooking oil as biodiesel for maintenance machines was a way of annually recycling as much as 10,000 litres of an otherwise useless waste product.

"The only downside we've found to the cooking-oil project," Holden jokes, "is that golfers are reporting a constant craving for fast food."

### **BIRDIES AND BIRDWATCHING**

With the Pacific Ocean nearby and a setting that includes a creek and a 60-acre forest, Victoria's Cordova Bay Golf Course has always attracted an astonishing variety of land and seabirds.

So creating an even more inviting bird habitat capable of nurturing rare species seemed the obvious next step. "It was a way to both engage the public and do something environmentally significant," says superintendent Dean Piller, who conducts birdwatching tours of the property twice a year.

An assortment of nesting boxes was strategically placed around the property, as well as feeders to help birds survive the winter at a course open year-round. And every spring the larger ponds are stocked with rainbow trout to attract birds of prey.

All this work has meant that more than 70 bird species are routinely seen at the course. And best of all, the presence of so many birds has eliminated the need to use insecticides.

"The birds are insect-eating machines," Piller says. "We haven't lost any turf from insect damage in years."

### **Pack your bags**

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1-800-565-3077; [www.bellbaygolfclub.com](http://www.bellbaygolfclub.com). Green fee: \$65 to \$79.

#### **STEWART CREEK GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB**

1-877-993-4653; [www.stewartcreekgolf.com](http://www.stewartcreekgolf.com). Green fee: \$135 to \$195.

#### **CLEAR LAKE GOLF COURSE**

204-848-4653; [www.clearlakegolfcourse.com](http://www.clearlakegolfcourse.com). Green fee: \$39 to \$50.

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