



EVERYONE BENEFITS – The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf

By Garry McKay



In many ways they seem like strange bedfellows but in fact golf courses and Audubon International are on the same side.

They are both trying to prove that golf courses aren't, or at least don't need to be, the evil villains that many environmentalists make them out to be.

“Golf has evolved over time to be a much more environmentally aware and environmentally conscious sport and business,” says Christine Kane, CEO of Audubon International.

“Twenty years ago, golf was looked at as using too much water, and too many chemicals, so it was not seen as an environmental ally. Over the years that has changed for the better.”

So, while Audubon International is willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with golf courses in the battle for the hearts and souls of the general public, it’s surprising how few Canadian facilities have taken advantage of it.

Barely more than 80 of the thousands of golf courses across Canada have joined the Audubon Co-operative Sanctuary Program for Golf.

Okay, it’s not as simple as just signing up. There is a program you have to go through to receive certification, and yes, there is a cost.

It’s \$350 (US) a year to be a member of Audubon International. Once you become certified, and you go through a recertification program every three years, you have the right to advertise your golf facility as an Audubon Co-operative Sanctuary Program for Golf.

The program is designed to continue the environmental improvement that golf is going through and to provide a way for the golf industry, the non-playing public, and golfers, to see how they’re doing.

“The ACSP Program for Golf has six areas that golf courses must achieve before they can be certified,” says Kane.

“First, everyone has to start with a site assessment and environmental plan. You have to see where you are to know where you’re going. You have to provide us with that information so we can help you with suggestions and information. You have to do that first then the next five you can do in whatever order makes the most sense for you.”

The other five categories that have to be addressed are: water conservation, water quality management, chemical use reduction and safety, wildlife and habitat management and outreach and education.

Kane says that some of those are self-explanatory like trying to reduce your water and making the most efficient use of water through design and technology.

Managing wildlife habit is one area that really seems to strike a chord with both golfers and non-golfers alike.

“Many golf courses have excellent opportunities for both long-term habitat use and migratory habitat use for birds and other animals,” said Kane.

“On average, about 30 per cent of a golf course property is actually used for golf and the rest is out of play areas, or facilities, so there are plenty of opportunities to create native areas. That could be by removing invasive plants and replanting with native plants that birds, or foxes, or deer, or monarch butterflies, that need milkweed, can use.”

That’s one aspect of the program that Tom Newton is quite familiar with. He’s the senior golf superintendent for the Niagara Parks Commission and oversees their three golf courses.

The two courses at Legends on the Niagara were certified ACSP for Golf in 2014 and recertified last year. He’s also in the process of getting certification for their Whirlpool Course.

As a result of improving the wildlife habitat at Legends, Newton says they regularly see deer, wild turkey, foxes, coyotes, Canada geese, bald eagles, hawks, and endangered snapping turtles, as well as an abundance of fish in their ponds.

The turtles have taken to laying their eggs in the sand traps and the maintenance staff, who have come to feel a connection with the program, immediately fence that small area of the bunker off with a sign explaining why and advising golfers to take a free drop somewhere else in the trap.

“I’m passionate myself about doing the right thing for the environment,” said Newton.

So, if you’re a golf course owner or general manager why should you be thinking about talking to your superintendent about Audubon Sanctuary Certification?

“The main benefit is doing the right thing,” says Kane. “From a business perspective there are certainly marketing and positioning benefits to be realized. We encourage courses to use this in their marketing to set themselves apart from their competition.

“We hear that in private clubs it instills a sense of ownership among the members and a sense of camaraderie among the employees.”

Audubon provides logos to certified member clubs that can even be incorporated into club merchandise.

Kane also provides this food for thought.

“The next generation of golfers, the millennials and the Gen Zs are going to expect this,” she says. “They’re going to expect that everyone should be doing their part for the environment.

“Very soon we’re going to reach the point where if your golf course is not doing this then you’re going to stick out and that’s a big change. I think this is going to be a big wake up call for a lot of owners.”

For more on the Audubon Co-operative Sanctuary Program for Golf, you can visit their website at: <https://www.auduboninternational.org/acspgolf>

Certified Audubon Co-operative Sanctuary Program for Golf Members in Canada

Beacon Hall Golf Club, Ontario

Beaconsfield Golf Club, Quebec

Bigwin Island Golf Club, Ontario

Cabot Cliffs, Nova Scotia

Cabot Links, Nova Scotia

Calgary Golf and Country Club, Alberta

Canmore Golf & Curling Club, Alberta

Capilano Golf and Country Club, British Columbia

Cardinal Golf Club, Ontario

Cedar Brae Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Cordova Bay Golf Course, British Columbia

Country Hills Golf Club, Alberta

D'Arcy Ranch Golf Club, Alberta

Donalda Club, Ontario

Earl Grey Golf Club, Alberta

Fairmont Banff Springs Golf Course, Alberta

Fairmont Chateau Whistler Golf Club, British Columbia

Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge Golf Club, Alberta

Fairmont Le Château Montebello Golf Club, Quebec

Fraserview Golf Course, British Columbia

Glen Abbey Golf Club, Ontario

Gleneagles Golf Course, British Columbia

Granite Golf Club, Ontario

Greensmere Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Hamilton Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Highland Pacific Golf, British Columbia

Highwood Golf and Country Club, Alberta

Hillsdale Golf and Country Club, Quebec

Innisfail Golf Club, Alberta

King's Riding Golf Club, Ontario

Ladies' Golf Club of Toronto, Ontario

Lake Joseph Golf Club, Ontario

Legends on the Niagara, Ontario

Lethbridge Country Club, Alberta

Links at Crowbush Cove Golf Course, Prince Edward Island

Loyalist Country Club, Ontario

Markham Green Golf Club, Ontario

Markland Wood Golf Club, Ontario

McCleery Golf Club, British Columbia

Mississauga Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Mount Bruno Country Club, Quebec

Oakdale Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Olds Central Highlands Golf Course, Alberta

Oslerbrook Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Ottawa Hunt and Golf Club, Limited, Ontario

Paradise Canyon Golf Resort, Alberta

Petawawa Golf Club, Ontario

Pheasant Run Golf Club, Ontario

Point Grey Golf and Country Club, British Columbia

Priddis Greens Golf and Country Club, Alberta

RiverBend Golf Club – Community, Ontario

Rivermead Club de Golf, Quebec

Rocky Crest Golf Club, Ontario

Royal Mayfair Golf Club, Alberta

Royal Ottawa Golf Club, Quebec

Salmon Arm Golf Club, British Columbia

Scarboro Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Silvertip Resort, Alberta

Springfield Golf and Country Club, Ontario

St. Charles Country Club, Manitoba

St. George's Golf and Country Club, Ontario

St. Thomas Golf and Country Club, Ontario

Station Creek Golf Club, Ontario

Stewart Creek Golf & Country Club, Alberta

Stonebridge Golf Club, Ontario

Summerlea Golf and Country Club, Quebec

Sunningdale Golf and Country Club, Ontario

The Glencoe Golf and Country Club, Alberta

The Ridge at Manitou Golf Club, Ontario

The Rock Golf Club, Ontario

The Royal Montreal Golf Club, Quebec

The Toronto Golf Club, Ontario

The Winston Golf Club, Alberta

Thornhill Country Club, Ontario

Turner Valley Golf and Country Club, Alberta

Uplands Golf Club, British Columbia

Vancouver Parks Board – Langara Golf, British Columbia

Westview Golf Club, Ontario

Whistler Golf Club, British Columbia

Whitevale Golf Club, Ontario

Whitlock Golf and Country Club, Quebec

Willow Park Golf and Country Club, Alberta

Wooden Sticks Golf Club, Ontario

York Downs Golf and Country Club, Ontario