

SIMPLE FENCES MINIMIZE GOOSE TRAFFIC

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MIGRATING and “residential” Canada geese are stately birds, admired for their individual and collective beauty in flight and on the water. Time spent on the turf is another matter. Golf courses and other expanses of turfgrass are among their favorite grazing grounds. In small numbers, geese have been welcomed guests, but along major migration flyways, huge flocks and frequent visits have become significant problems for golfers and golf course superintendents. Their grazing habits can quickly give well-groomed, freshly mown turf an unacceptably unkempt appearance. More noticeable and unpopular are their droppings, indiscriminately deposited over the property.

Many attempts have been made to reduce or eliminate goose incursions on golf courses, but most have failed or have not been feasible over a long period of time. Repellents, trapping and removal during molting season, physical hazing with vehicles, special hunts, and explosives or pyrotechnic devices have given temporary

relief, but these methods lack permanence unless course personnel are continually involved. Dogs have been used successfully at several locations, but they may not fit in well at heavily played courses.

A few years ago, Garold Murphy, at Somerset Country Club in St. Paul, Minnesota, began using shiny narrow tape as a fence around ponds on the property. The idea was to prevent geese that land on the water from gaining a foothold on the shore. Because the tape is silver on one side and red on the other, the tape may also have a “scare” effect as it is moved by wind. Apparently, geese cannot push through the tape and are unable to duck under or step over the single strand.

Disbelief is a natural response to such a simple, passive restraint, but one cannot argue with the success at Somerset. Even stronger evidence is given by superintendent John Stevenson at Potawatamie Park Golf Course near St. Charles, Illinois, where he must cope with extensive frontage on the Fox River. Almost any type of barrier seems to be

effective, since surplus electrical wire is used by Martin Fuchs at Oakland Hills Country Club in Birmingham, Michigan, and thin nylon rope is used at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minnesota, where Patricia Knaggs is superintendent.

The fences are effective if erected on shore near the waterline, and they are equally effective when placed in the water a couple of feet from the water’s edge. Installations in the water are a bit more difficult, but they eliminate mowing problems around the stakes. Fences installed on land are less visible in areas where grasses are allowed to grow to their mature height.

Geese that land on solid ground will not be affected by this procedure, of course, but if their preferred water runway is fenced to prevent access to feeding and nesting areas, they are encouraged to go elsewhere. That should sharply reduce the number of birds returning to these fenced courses in the future. To most superintendents along the Mississippi flyway, these passive restraints are well worth the trouble of installation.

Surplus electrical wire is used by superintendent Martin Fuchs for fencing around the pond on the 16th hole at Oakland Hills Country Club. Note that the fence is well inside the shoreline and is as effective as those on the banks.

