



Seattle
Parks & Recreation

Greening Golf

Healthy Environment Stories



Seattle is blessed to have 6,400 acres of parks and green space, nearly 12% of the city's land. Included within this open space are four public golf courses managed by Seattle Parks and Recreation. These recreational parks are spread throughout the city, creating opportunities for all residents of Seattle to have access.

Golf courses are important for more than recreation, however. They have many environmental benefits due to their large areas of permeable surfaces and vegetation; Seattle's public courses provide over 400 acres of greenspace. The turf, trees, and ponds at our courses capture and filter rainwater, acting like a giant sponge that improves our water quality and reduces flooding. The Trust for Public Land estimates that over 11 million cubic feet of stormwater is captured due to the natural filtration provided by this green space.

This is particularly important in urban settings where rainwater management is crucial to protecting our waterways. Two of Seattle's streams – Thornton Creek and Longfellow Creek – run through our golf courses, and SPR works to ensure there is plenty of clean water for aquatic wildlife. At Jackson Golf Course, three retention ponds capture and reuse water for irrigation, and an additional one adds to stormwater retention, preventing flooding downstream. We also maintain a 25-foot vegetative buffer to provide shade and other habitat benefits along these streams.

SPR's golf courses are part of our Integrated Pest Management program that seeks to limit the use of pesticides. We use hand weeding where possible, as when removing noxious weeds like purple loosestrife, and use herbicides only as a last resort. We also partner with our urban forest restoration team to improve habitat along the edges of our courses through the removal of Himalayan blackberry and English ivy, and the planting of native trees and shrubs.

At Interbay Golf Course, built over a historical landfill, SPR is seeking sustainability certification from Audubon International in 2019. We have already completed three of the six requirements through this pilot. "Our current practices are already quite green," stated Greg Van Hollebeke, golf superintendent. "The certification process will help us document our processes better, improve where we need to, and set a standard that will hopefully be transferable to our other courses."

Seattle Parks and Recreation has also partnered with community volunteers from the neighboring community garden to plan a pollinator garden at Interbay Golf Course. Supported by a grant from the National Recreation and Parks Association, the pollinator garden will bring in native plants along an edge of the course, increasing habitat without impacting play. By working with the community, we are redefining "green" on our golf courses.

Learn more

www.seattle.gov/parks/find/golf