

Off The Fringe

DRY as a Bone



intendent at Rochelle Ranch Golf Course, a public 18-holer in Rawlins, Wyo., which just experienced the driest June in its history. “I’ve had about six-tenths of an inch of rain in the last two-and-half months.”

Consequently, Rawlins is under mandatory city-enforced water restrictions. Befus is prohibited from watering the course between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m.

“I go out and hit my hot spots before 9,” he says. “We’ve got some areas that are hard — physically hard, because they didn’t put much topsoil down when they built the course in 2002. It’s not a problem in normal conditions, but it is now.”

To stay on top of things, Befus has raised mowing heights and reduced the amount of nitrogen he puts down.

And Befus is hardly alone. The

NOAA National Climatic Data Center’s July drought report says July 2012 was the hottest month ever recorded, with an average temp of 77.6 degrees. That makes June, the 14th warmest and 10th driest June on record, seem mild.

The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor data indicate that as of July’s end, 63 percent of the Lower 48 states were drought stricken. That’s “the highest such value for the U.S. Drought Monitor since its inception in 2000,” states the National Weather Service.

“It’s been rough,” says Kyle Allen, assistant superintendent at The Bridgewater Club in Carmel, Ind. Unlike Rawlins, Carmel is not facing water restrictions. The course is in fact quite wet, Allen says, thanks to the liberal watering they’ve been doing.

“In a normal summer we’re able to dry out the course a little bit more and get better playing conditions based on normal rainfall,” he says.

This summer, the guys at Bridgewater have been watering at night and hand watering in the morning. Afternoons are spent doing touch-ups on hot spots.

AS THE DROUGHT OF 2012 DRAGS ON, SUPERINTENDENTS ARE FEELING THE HEAT, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

By **Beth Geraci** Senior Editor

OK, so it’s hot. *Really* hot. *Everywhere*. And judging from the way the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center puts it, there’s no end in sight.

“Dryness and drought, exacerbated by above-normal temperatures, have been increasing both in extent and intensity across much of the central and northern U.S.,” the center stated on its website at the end of July.

Just the word “exacerbate” seems to exacerbate the heat, does it not? And superintendents from the West Coast to the East are feeling it, both on their skin and on the job. We asked them how they’re coping.

“It’s pretty dry,” confirmed Dave Befus, super-



On the bright side, Allen observes, the Indiana summer has been less humid than others, causing less disease pressure. "We've had one of the driest summers ever — ever, humidity wise," he says. "So it feels cooler. The lack of humidity causes the grass to dry out faster and get hot, so you have to water more. But it also prevents disease."

Over in Georgia, courses finally are getting some much-needed rain. "Things really changed dramatically a couple weeks ago," says Mark Abrams, superintendent at Wolf Creek Golf Club in Senoia,

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— **DAVE BEFUS**, SUPERINTENDENT AT
ROCHELLE RANCH GOLF COURSE

Ga. "We couldn't get any rain. The bermudagrass on our fairways, we couldn't put enough water out. And keeping the rough going... now we're catching afternoon thunderstorms pretty much every day."

In Georgia, it was dry from mid-June to mid-July — "really dry," Abrams says. "Normally it's a little more humid in mid-June, but this year it was low humidity through June and no rain. It was just, appearance wise, the bermudagrass looked really dry — like we weren't watering it. You just couldn't keep up."

In Senoia, it got up to 107 degrees one day. Several other days were in the hundreds as well. "The parched areas, we have a few on the fairways and roughs. But those'll green up soon," Abrams says.

As hot and dry as the summer's been, sometimes you just have to call it a day. Because when it comes down to it, "there's not much I can do," Befus says. "I'm hoping for August and September to cool down and get some rain."

Fire Destroys Maintenance Building, Kills Two Dogs

Sad news from my friend Chris Sorrell, who recently took the superintendent job at Boiling Springs Golf Course in Woodward, Okla.

A fire destroyed his maintenance facility, and most important to him, killed his two dogs, "Shooter," a 12-year-old schnauzer, and "Boswell," a 2-year-old border collie.

"It's totally awful. I couldn't get anywhere near the door... there was black smoke everywhere. (The dogs) were maybe eight or 10 feet away from me," Sorrell told me, sadness in his voice. "You know, the whole bloody thing could have burned down if my dogs were just out on the course with me, instead of being trapped inside the shop."

Nearby courses and the local John Deere distributor, PK Equipment, have already lent a hand, donating mowers and a cup cutter.

If Sorrell's name looks familiar, it's because he wrote the June 2011 *Golfdom* cover story, "Don't Be a Target," and he's written for the blog.

Sorrell was waiting for the insurance adjuster to arrive as I was talking to him. The fire department has told him the cause of the fire is unknown, calling it an accidental fire with an indeterminate origin. Among other difficulties, his irrigation system is down since his central computer was located inside the maintenance shop.

Regardless of all the bad news, Chris seemed like he understood that this was something he could overcome.

"Nobody was hurt, no one was in the building. The members are all being very supportive," Sorrell told me. "We'll make it through one way or another."



A fire cost Boiling Springs GC all its equipment, records, irrigation controls and the lives of two beloved course dogs.