

Environmental Implications of Adding a Driving Range to the Sligo Creek Golf Course

An Individual Report to the Board of Directors of the Montgomery County Revenue Authority

Dear Directors: Below for your consideration is a summary of environmental problems that the Board of the Friends of Sligo Creek sees as associated with a driving range at the Sligo Creek Golf Course. This summary was originally submitted to the Sligo Creek Golf Course Stakeholders Group on June 17 as support for that group's deliberations. Thank you for your attention.

Bruce Sidwell, President, Board of Directors, Friends of Sligo Creek; September 2008

By and large, the current golf course is not a significant drawback to the local environment. It does not cause obviously excessive light, air, noise, or water pollution. It has a small stream—whose stormwater features have recently been improved at great expense—many large trees, and some areas of understory shrubs. Since the property thus has many of the basic elements for wildlife habitat (shelter, sources of food, water, and some places for birds and other wildlife to raise young) it integrates fairly well with the surrounding natural parkland; there is, however, a lack of connectivity of the natural patches.

The golf course's chief natural drawbacks at this time are probably the deleterious effects of fertilizers and of the pesticides used for control of insects, weeds, and fungi. It would also benefit the local environment if less of the course were closely mowed, since short non-native turf offers almost no benefit to wildlife and is much less effective than woodland at absorbing and cleansing rainwater.

Adding a driving range to the 70-acre site would detract from the natural benefits of the area:

- 1) because it would be a large area of nothing but closely-mowed grass, it would further reduce the area available to wildlife;
 - 2) having no trees or shrubs would severely limit the site's ability to retain stormwater, cool the area, reduce CO₂, and buffer traffic noises;
 - 3) having nets and fences would impede and drive away wildlife;
 - 4) over time, the soil of the driving range would become further impacted by use of ball-gathering equipment and possibly by the millions of hits by the balls-- this will further degrade the ability of the turf to retain rainwater;
 - 5) noise from the range would drive away birds and other wildlife and, for some, can disrupt communications crucial for mating and reproduction;
 - 6) if used, lights would harass and confuse birds, bats, and other wildlife; in addition to being unattractive, the light towers may be lethal impediments to migrating birds;
 - 7) making room for the driving range would mean that numerous mature trees would be cut down and the roots of other trees would be damaged by construction traffic;
 - 8) increased traffic to the course would mean more air pollution, harassment of wildlife and, ultimately, more pavement for parking and for turning lanes
 - 9) increased use of the site would invariably mean more trash generated, contaminating both the golf course and adjacent parkland;
 - 10) the energy costs of a driving range, especially if lighted, would increase.
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