

THE INSIDER: environment

Scott Hollister



The Sharp Park layout includes a marsh that separates the golf course from the Pacific Ocean.
Photo courtesy of Sharp Park



Sharp Park's future still up in the air

A Northern California public golf course that is one of the final works of legendary architect Alister Mackenzie remains at the center of a roiling controversy between environmentalists and the golf community more than a year after the debate first gained notoriety.

Since *GCM* first turned its attention to the pitched political battle over the future of Sharp Park in Pacifica, Calif., which is part of the city of San Francisco's recreation and parks division (see "New chapter in Sharp Park saga" on [Page 34](#) of the Feb. 2010 issue), the story has added several more twists and turns. The most recent of those was a federal lawsuit filed in March by environmentalists claiming management of the popular layout violated the Endangered Species Act.

At issue at Sharp Park are the federally protected California red-legged frog and the San Francisco garter snake that have found an ideal habitat in the water features that dot the course, including the Laguna Salada marsh that separates the course from the Pacific Ocean.

Environmentalists insist that golfers, the management of the golf course and the occasional flooding the property experiences adversely affect those protected species, and the only way to properly protect them, in their view, is to close the course and convert the area into a natural preserve. Golf interests — from course managers to the city and loyal patrons of the club — disagree, arguing that course renovation plans put forth in late 2009 that would improve habitat for the frogs and snakes while preserving an important recreational amenity for residents was a win-win for both the environment and golfers.

That report hardly settled matters. Earlier this year, the Wild Equity Institute, a San

surprisingly, ran counter to that 2009 report and called for the complete conversion of the course to a natural reserve as the only option to fully protect the endangered species.

Then, just 12 days after that study hit the streets, the Sharp Park Working Group, which had been studying the future of the course, had its own say, issuing yet another report that reaffirmed the view that golf and nature can coexist at Sharp Park through a habitat enhancement of Laguna Salada and a golf renovation project.

Those reports set the stage for the legal action, filed by a coalition of environmental groups that included the Center for Biological Diversity and the Sierra Club, which charged the city with crafting inadequate conservation plans and calling for the immediate closure of the course.

The response from the San Francisco Public Golf Alliance, a golf advocacy group that has backed the renovation plans, was straightforward: "We think the lawsuit is premature, not well founded and will ultimately be unsuccessful."

Phil Ginsburg, the general manager of the recreation and park department, took a similar tack in response to the suit, telling the *San Francisco Chronicle* that its plans for Sharp Park strike a "balance between providing a legitimate recreational opportunity and protecting the habitat."

Stay tuned.

NEWS & notes

Agriculture and water management experts convened in March in the heart of California's central valley to participate in The Intelligent Use of Water Summit. The event, presented by Rain Bird in partnership with the Center for Irrigation Technology at California State University's Fresno campus, provided insight into California's water issues — policies, legislation, programs, initiatives and trends. Panels addressed topics including land and water rights issues surrounding the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, recent policy initiatives and the impact of the Water Conservation Act of 2009. Panelists had the opportunity to showcase their water conservation case studies and share their successful strategies and initiatives on outdoor water conservation with those in attendance as well as those watching and participating via a webcast on Rain Bird's website and Facebook page. A full rebroadcast is available online at www.rainbird.com/summit.



Presented in partnership
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Francisco-based environmental policy advocacy
organization, issued a study of its own that, not

Scott Hollister (shollister@gcsaa.org) is GCM's editor-in-chief.

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