

Environmental and Economic Benefits of Naturalization

Location: **Stone Mountain, Georgia**
Type of property: **Resort, 36-hole golf course**
Type of membership: **ACSP for Golf**
Member since: **1998**
Certified since: **2006**



Since joining ACSP for Golf in 2006, Stone Mountain Golf Club has done extensive work in enhancing wildlife habitat and increasing naturalized areas on the course, thereby significantly eliminating the costs associated with maintaining turf and ornamental landscapes. In 2012 they began a project to convert all of their plant beds to native plant and xeric gardens. The club converted ornamental areas that were traditionally dominated by annual flowers to native plant beds filled with perennials such as lantana, cone flower, and butterfly bush. They also created new native plant beds along established wildlife habitat corridors, native grass areas, early stage succession fields, mixed forest with understory, and shoreline and wetland areas. Not only did this enhance habitat for resident wildlife, it also reduced their overall water use and costs associated with purchasing annual flowers each year.

In addition, the club participated in the North American Butterfly Association Spring Seasonal Butterfly count as part of their habitat enhancement case study to assess the success of their habitat improvement efforts. “Everyone loves to watch butterflies. No matter how old you are, [you notice] a connection to a healthy ecosystem and the presence of various species of butterfly,” said Golf Course Superintendent Anthony Williams. In April 2012, the course documented 16 different butterfly species, including Zebra Swallowtail, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Orange Sulphur, Variegated Fritillary, American Lady, Common Buckeye, Little-wood Satyr, Duskywing, and Zabulon Skipper.

In one year, the course saved \$1,800 by eliminating the purchase of annual plants. Since joining the program, Williams estimates they have saved in excess of 100 million gallons of water as a result of eliminating highly maintained turf and gardens and using native plants in the landscape. Naturalization efforts have also resulted in reduced lab costs associated with mowing and maintaining turf areas—it is estimated maintenance has been reduced by nearly 13,000 man hours since 2006. And of course, these areas have resulted in improved habitat and increased wildlife activity, including numerous waterfowl, wading birds, warblers, finches, birds of prey, and hummingbirds.

An excellent guideline for reducing turf acreage can be found in this [article](#) from the Green Section Record, a publication of USGA.

The course’s environmental stewardship efforts go beyond this particular naturalization project and include other efforts such as designating no-spray buffer zones around water features to protect water quality, nest box construction and monitoring, and using

the golf course as an environmentally sound demonstration site.

Said Williams on the economic and environmental benefits of their efforts, “Active ACSP membership is the cornerstone of excellence that supports the blending of cutting edge environmental stewardship and sound economic strategy. This business model will lead the way to stability and success as we face tougher economic and regulatory pressures.”

