

Fossil Trace Superintendent Noy Sparks in Interview with Sustainable Golden

By Cyndi Szymanski 9/23/26

Greetings all. My name is Cyndi Szymanski and I'm a new board member with Sustainable Golden. Since volunteering with Sustainable Golden, I've been addressing water use in Golden, primarily examining and promoting ways to reduce water consumption.

This has been a tough drought year for Colorado. We haven't experienced this in many years, but it might be something that repeats itself in the future. As the City of Golden assessed its water use and implemented reductions on lawn and garden laundering, I started to wonder about the City's largest manicured lawn, the golf course at Fossil Trace Golf Club.

To learn more about how the city addressed the golf course's watering needs, I reached out to Noy Sparks, Fossil Trace's Superintendent and agronomist, to ask some questions.

Noy, tell me a little about yourself?

I developed an interest in golf in college. I worked at a course to be able to play more golf during the summers. I tried out a few other jobs but ultimately pursued a degree in agronomy—studying turf. I found managing a golf course and helping to create an excellent guest experience is where I am happiest and what I find most rewarding.

I was working as an assistant superintendent at Lakewood Country Club when Golden started to build Fossil Trace. I was offered a position to assist with the construction and grow-in, and shortly after the course opened in 2003, I was promoted to superintendent. It's a great place to work.

Tell me a little bit about how the course watering occurs. Where does the water come from? Are you using potable water on the greens?

Very few golf courses use potable water on their turf. Typically, most golf courses use non-potable water—as does Fossil Trace. Our water is transferred from storage in the mountains via Clear Creek to Golden, then pumped through a raw water line to Welch Ditch, which ends up in our storage ponds on golf course property. There are two storage ponds on the course which hold up to two weeks of water.

How did this year's drought impact the turf at Fossil Trace?

My philosophy in managing the course is striving for turf health and excellent playing conditions, this translates to providing a firm and fast golf course. This doesn't necessarily mean a green course. Using too much water to maintain a visibly green course can negatively impact play.

This year the City of Golden developed a Water Drought Response. Different stages of drought required different water reduction targets. Stage One required a 15% water reduction. Preserving turf requires winter watering, but due to the unusually dry winter, by May the course used an unprecedented amount of water compared to previous years. Starting the year with heavier watering required aggressive water reductions to meet the goal.

What did you do and did you meet the target?

We reduced water use by 25%, meeting and exceeding the goal. Essentially, we reduced overall watering and tested the limits of drought tolerance on the grass. Starting in mid-May we reduced water use by 15%, June was 15-20%, July was 25% and August was 25%. The August rain helped as well. Irrigation never replaces a good rainstorm; the August storms allowed the grass to rebound. This quick recovery showed that grass can be stressed such as in a drought and still bounce back. This is key to avoiding expensive grass replacement- which would in turn require more water.

Month	2025 Usage (Acre-Feet)	2026 Usage (Acre-Feet)	Usage Reduction
May	28.28	19.77	30%
June	41.33	36.69	12%
July	55.51	41.97	25%
August	50.22	38.13	24%
Total	175.34	136.56	22%

The course has a very sophisticated computer system that adjusts each sprinkler and with daily monitoring and adjustments we watered just enough to keep the grass healthy. We used soil and moisture tools. We lost some grass and had some disease in July but overall, the course is healthy.

What does this mean for next year or the next time there is a drought?

Going forward, I will continue to focus on overall reductions. Having established the turf's health threshold, I have a better understanding of how to address future water shortages and not push so close to the edge of the turf's needs. This was a good opportunity to establish watering boundaries for future drought seasons.

How does all this relate to people's home lawns and the similar experiences they faced with watering reductions?

It's hard as a golf course superintendent, I feel like my home lawn might be a reflection on how well I do my professional job. That said, I don't believe in perfectly manicured lawns. People need to move beyond the idea of green grass in this arid climate, especially in times of drought. Your lawn can handle more stress than you think. Bluegrass is a hardy grass and doesn't have to be perfectly green to survive. It can be pushed a long way before you will lose your lawn. There are lots of simple things people can do, learning how to look at your grass for evidence of life at the roots is a great way to ensure it is still alive. Seeking out professional advice is helpful too.

Thanks Noy. I appreciate your efforts and look forward to partnering with the City of Golden on water conservation.



https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hiyy8U1o1O0h4SQ9y8CKHDu5rbKSgiui/view?usp=drive_link