

Environmentally sound

Legacy golf course at Cragun's recertified by Audubon International



Brainerd Dispatch/Vince Meyer

Nancy Richardson (left), director of Audubon International Signature Programs, and Matt McKinnon, supervisor of Cragun's Legacy Golf Courses, survey the fairway off the clubhouse veranda during a recent tour of the course in East Gull Lake. Cragun's is one of two golf courses in the nation that have earned Audubon International's seal of approval.

BY VINCE MEYER
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EAST GULL LAKE — Cragun's Legacy Golf Course has been recertified as environmentally sound by Audubon International.

Cragun's joins a list of just two courses — the other is Pinehurst in North Carolina — that have earned this certification, which states that Cragun's will manage its course according to a set of principles established by Audubon International.

Among these principles are a devotion to wildlife conservation, habitat enhancement and water conservation and the use of native plants and shrubs. Nancy Richardson, director of Audubon Signature Programs, toured the course last week and gave it her seal of approval.

"Look at that area over there," Richardson said, pointing to an out-of-bounds rough off the fairway. "It has a low buffer, higher shrubs and saplings, then the overstory of trees. That's a transition of cover types that provides safety for animals. They don't have to go from trees onto turf grass. They can get to the edge of vegetation and peek out and see if they want to venture out. That's what we want to see. We want wildlife to be able to move through the property unobserved."

Cragun's developers committed early to creating an environmentally friendly golf course, and it shows. Matt McKinnon, course supervisor, said he's seen deer, bear, fox and turtles on the fairways and wood ducks, eagles and dozens of other birds winging overhead.

"Golf course (managers) often hear, 'You're just doing whatever it takes to sell tee times,'" McKinnon said. "But when people come here they see the Audubon logo and know that this course cares. We're not out to rape the land and dump chemicals."

To assure that the 600-acre course maintains its Audubon certification McKinnon must keep his maintenance center clean. This accounts for one-third of the certification process. McKinnon also must monitor the water in 100-acre Stephens Lake and the wells that are used for irrigation, and he must monitor the soil to make sure that too much fertilizer and pesticides are not being applied. Drainage is another concern. Cragun's must prove that runoff from the golf course is not harming water anywhere in the surrounding watershed.

"One thing our members usually say," Richardson said, "is that the cost of doing things right actually leads to a reduction in operating costs."

Visitors to Cragun's can now be sure that the fairways and greens are being managed for the good of golfers while the surrounding woods and water are being managed for the good of wildlife.



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