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Is golf being unfairly targeted in California in wake of governor's order to curb water usage?

By John Strege

Golf courses seem to be bearing the brunt of public opprobrium in California in the wake of Governor Jerry Brown's recent executive order to reduce water consumption in the drought-stricken state.

"We have kind of taken it that way," Marc Connerly, executive director of the California Golf Course Owners Association said on Friday.

It is easy to see why. A story in the Daily Beast about Bermuda Dunes in the Coachella Valley east of Los Angeles carried this headline: "Town with 11 golf courses is sucking California dry."

"We feel that some of the comments are a little unfair and maybe have called some negative attention to us that is undeserved," Connerly said. "I have been in communication with the governor's office. His staff has tried to make it clear that they're really not targeting us, but was using us an example of large landscaping, large turf areas. We just kind of fall under that category.

"We're trying to use that attention to get our message out there, and to start to share how efficient golf courses have been for many years, and how proactive we've been to use our water very wisely.

"The thing the public needs to realize, too, is that golf course superintendents have a great deal of education and training that go into their position. They know so much more about what it takes to care for a lawn than the average homeowner or landscape maintenance guy at a park or office complex. There's really lot we can learn from superintendents. It is unfortunate people look at golf courses as water wasters. It couldn't be further from the truth."

A point that tends to be missing from any discussions of golf courses and water usage in a drought that has entered its fourth year is "the importance of golf to the economy," Connerly said.

“It’s a \$13 billion industry and employs 128,000 people [in California]. Golf courses uses less than one percent of potable water. So be careful what you ask for. If you want to take away that one percent, are you prepared to put 128,000 people out of work and send a \$13 billion hit to state’s economy?”

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