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## Wildlife Sanctuary Birds & birdies

### JBLM golf course earns Audubon Society certification

By Dean Siemon/Northwest Guardian

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Golfers on Joint Base Lewis-McChord's two courses might be walking off the final green lately feeling satisfied with their rounds and not fully appreciating why. That's because a tremendous amount of planning has brought to life the woods, fields and wetlands surrounding the courses and enhanced the golfing experience.

Dragonflies dart around and barn swallows fly back and forth from nests near the driving range. Staff members catch occasional glimpses of members of a family of coyotes living on the grounds.

"That's a sign of a really good, healthy ecosystem," said David Wienecke, environmental system manager for golf courses at the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

On Aug. 7, Joellen Lampman from Audubon International recognized JBLM's series of environmental projects at Eagles Pride Golf Course with an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program golf course certificate at the first-ever Green Golf Tournament and Eco Summit. The only other Army golf course to receive the honor was Ryder Golf Course at Fort Bragg, N.C.

The certificate rewarded a year of dedication, but reminded all those involved of the hard work that still lay ahead not only at Eagles Pride, but also at Whispering Firs at McChord Field.

"We're doing a whole lot of different things," Wienecke said. "It will be a greener golf course and a more sustainable, eco-friendly golf course."

Wienecke started the effort by analyzing both courses and discovering about 60 percent of Eagles Pride is composed of woodlands and wetlands that host a vast array of animals, fish, insects and birds, in addition to plants and vegetation.

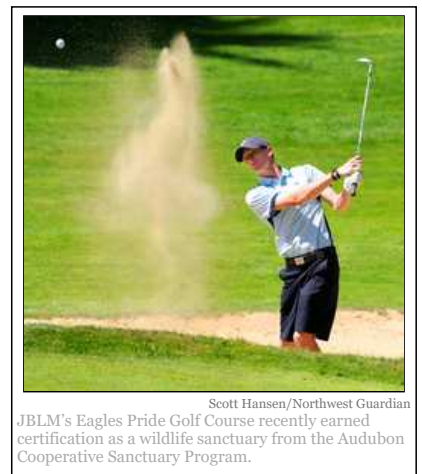
"I realized we have a lot more going on here than just golf," Wienecke said.

Wienecke and staff integrated a pest management plan for Eagles Pride into the JBLM golf courses' sustainability plan, which provides a baseline assessment for daily maintenance of the course. The sustainability plan assesses mowing, fertilization, hazardous waste, water conservation, water quality, recycling, environmental planning and education and outreach.

Planners realized cutting back on mowing would naturalize more than 60 acres of former playing area. The tactic reduced fuel consumption, air pollution, enlarged the habitat for deer and doubled the bird population to 80 species. Managing water resources on the course helped, too.

Designated Eagles Pride ponds and wetlands now feed the irrigation and fire suppression systems for the golf course. Some are interconnected and aerified with fountains running water year-round.

All that water was good for the fish population.



Scott Hansen/Northwest Guardian  
JBLM's Eagles Pride Golf Course recently earned certification as a wildlife sanctuary from the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

“There are a lot more fish, amphibians and water fowl at Eagles Pride because of the water depth, ranging between 12 inches and about 30 or 40 feet,” Wienecke said.

But the work is far from over. A three-year soil biota (total collection of organisms) study, which concludes in a month, has provided Wienecke a lens through which he looks at the ecosystem of the root zone — everything under the grass. Washington State University scientists are analyzing the physical and chemical composition of soil samples from different parts of Eagles Pride.

“The goal is to see what non-chemical options, such as compost amendments, can be used to increase turf health and reduce disease incidents and at the same time reduce pesticide and fertilizer applications,” Wienecke said.

Another part of the soil study is to determine the effects of multiple course renovations.

“We’re going to know more about this golf course than anyone else,” Wienecke said.

Green projects at Eagles Pride have been funded through fiscal year 2014. Whispering Firs will conduct the same projects en route to its own Audubon certification, which will be only the third Air Force course certified, following Eglin Golf Course at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. and Mesquite Grove Golf Course at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas.

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