



CITY OF RAPID CITY

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Golf Course Winter Play Policy

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Recommendation: Weather patterns in and around Rapid City make it possible to play golf during a good portion of the winter months. This statement does not imply that winter play is in any way good for the turf. Revenue generation and a few golfers' desire to play need to be carefully compared with increased maintenance costs plus down time in the spring and summer season should winter play cause a green to die off. There is no perfect formula to determine when during the winter a golf course can safely tolerate traffic, and conditions can change dramatically during the day. Because of that, it is our recommendation to keep the current policy, which closes the greens to winter play on December 1st, in place.

Background: In the late 1970s and into the 1980s Meadowbrook Golf Course was the best course in Rapid City and the Black Hills. It was at one time one of the best 50 courses in the entire country. In 1984 Meadowbrook hosted a national USGA Women's Public Links golf tournament. This tournament brought players from around the globe to Rapid City. During this time it is my understanding that the course and greens were open for play all year, when the weather cooperated.

In the late 1980's the continued year around play on the course began making maintenance a nightmare. The course started losing sections of greens, it had ruts and bare areas in the fairways from cart traffic, and the list goes on.

There wasn't enough money to keep the course in good shape for year around golf, and the playability of the course started going down. In 1988 the golf committee at that time passed a winter play policy that kept golf carts off the fairways at Meadowbrook. The policy change came too late however, as the next year Meadowbrook was dropped from the top 50 courses in the country. Not only was Meadowbrook not in the top 50 in the country, it wasn't even the best course in the hills anymore.

Golf carts were banned from the course, but winter play continued through the 1990s. The course continued to deteriorate to a point that in 1997, because of an outcry from the golfing public, the City called upon the USGAA Green Section to come and look at the problems facing the Meadowbrook golf course. Winter play was one of the topics, and there is documentation of this visit. One item detailed in this report was that the amount of winter play at Meadowbrook was taking its toll on the quality of turf during the spring and early summer. Playing on the greens and on the fairways was resulting in excessive wear to the turf surfaces. The USGA said at that time there should be serious consideration to playing temporary tees and greens to prevent some of the winterkill.

When JJ Walraven became superintendent of the Rapid City Golf courses in early 2000, he asked the appointed golf committee at that time to close the greens to winter play so that turf on the greens could rest. The golf committee researched this request thoroughly because they knew closing the greens wouldn't be a popular decision.

There would be revenue lost and not much was known at that time about how this would affect the health of the greens. What they found was that closing the greens in the winter actually made the golf course playable earlier in the spring, made for a healthier turf and the lost revenues amounted to an estimated \$2,500 due to the fact that most of the play during the previous winter was pass holders who weren't paying daily fees.

At the February 2007 Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meeting the Board made the closing of the greens in the winter time official by passing a winter play policy. This is the first time since 2000 that Meadowbrook actually had a policy statement on winter play. This policy was implemented in part because the administration and board felt that the Golf Superintendent needed the support to enforce what we were already doing.

Summary: Just to be clear **the course is open year around**. There are days we close it because of snow, freeze, rain, etc., but if it is nice out you **can** go out and play. Meadowbrook greens are not open to play after the first week of December but we do provide temporary greens to players. These temporary greens have been created in front of the regular greens, or on the tee boxes if the course is set up to play in reverse. The temporary green area is mowed very short and holes and flags are put in which gives the golfer a point to play to and a similar feel to regular winter greens. (True it is not the same as playing on the regular greens, but playing in the winter time is not the same as playing when the grass is green either.) It might not be as smooth as the regular greens but most golfers don't mind because when they are still able to get out on the course they can hit the ball and breathe the fresh air. And isn't that truly what it is all about?

It is also true that other courses in the area are open to play with their greens being used. I wish them luck and hope they never lose a green and that they have the extra dollars to put back into the greens each spring. Almost everything we have read as well as the advice given to us from the United States Golfing Association (USGA) and the Professional Golfing Association (PGA) office indicates that the problems with stress from play in the wintertime is not worth the extra maintenance in the spring or the possibility of losing a green, or greens, altogether.

Because four of our greens are located in very poor spots we would have to close and cover them each year anyway. These greens will not be open to play even if we did open the other greens to play. These four greens barely survive the winter the way it is.

An independent golf committee made up of golfers and appointed by the Mayor several years ago, put out a report that the revenues associated with keeping the greens playable all winter would not cover the cost associated with maintenance and fixing the greens each spring because of the damage. They came to the conclusion that it wasn't worth it to the course.

In 2005 we completed a golf survey of Meadowbrook members. In that survey more than 70% of the respondents said that they understood that playing on regular greens could have an adverse affect on spring/summer time play and that playing on temporary greens in the winter time wasn't a problem to them.

I understand the concerns that have been brought up, but the course is open to play during non freeze days with the temporary greens available. I believe if you think back you can agree we have seen a tremendous improvement in the quality of the course over the last four years. We believe that since we started closing the greens in the winter time it has made a significant improvement in the spring and summer golf experience. Evidently our citizens think so as well, because they have voted us the #1 Golf Course in the Hills for the past three years. To us this has meant everything, especially with the years of struggle from having the course heading in a downward spiral. We have finally gotten a handle on this maintenance challenge and are now seeing vast improvements to the golfing experience.

The City Council has entrusted us to protect our public assets. We believe that by closing the greens to winter play we are not only protecting our assets, but also reducing the maintenance costs and creating an improved golfing experience for future generations to come.

Each year for the past four years when we sell passes to our golfing citizens we let them know that the greens will be shut down for winter play on December 1st. Most understand that they are buying a pass that allows them to play year around but only on regular greens from April through November. Most are fine with this procedure as documented in our survey of 2005.

CITY OF RAPID CITY

GOLF COURSE WINTER PLAY POLICY

PURPOSE: To establish a winter play policy for Meadowbrook and Executive golf courses during the winter months of December through March. Opening the courses for play in March will be at the sole discretion of the Golf Course Superintendent and will depend on weather and course conditions.

INTENT: The intent of this policy is to state limitations for winter use of the golf courses which will aid in the prevention of winter damage. We are fortunate in Rapid City to live in an area where golf can be played year around. This does not mean that year-round play is good for the golf course. Contrary to popular belief, there are a variety of conditions that can damage the golf course. Weather and traffic are the main culprits that can cause serious injury and turf loss. Rapid City has experienced continued drought the past three years and that has contributed highly to establishing a written policy.

A USGA Agronomist visited Meadowbrook Golf Course in 2006 and addressed maintenance issues for the courses. USGA has visited Meadowbrook in previous years and this practice was reinstated in 2006 primarily because we were able to share costs of the visit with the SDGA. Winter play was discussed and the conclusion is basically the same as in past years. Revenue generation during the winter months needs to be carefully compared with increased maintenance costs that are typically associated with winter traffic. The increase costs, above the already set budget, would include the need for more aeration, increased fertilization, and more weed control. The USGA further states "that sustained traffic over the winter turf invariably results in diminished root systems and decreased stress tolerance during the growing season, when most of our rounds are played. Unless the golf course can demonstrate that winter play provides significant green fee and concession revenue, the negatives likely outweigh the positives." Winter traffic negatively affects the quality of the golf course during the primary season. As stated earlier, we are in a drought situation and this negative effect contributes significantly to the importance of limiting the amount of winter play.

It is anticipated that producing this written policy will aid in establishing a quality product during the major months of the golf season, and provide a product for everyone to enjoy in accordance with our Mission Statement. The Golf Course Staff wants to continue to Create Smiles.

CRITERIA:

- The golf course greens will remain closed during the winter months December through March, unless early opening is authorized by Golf Course Superintendent.
- Temporary greens will be utilized.
- No motorized golf carts will be allowed. Exceptions will be made for golfers who are handicapped, or those who have health issues and a Physicians recommendation.
- The Cart Storage Building will remain closed during the winter months. If assistance is needed, cart owners should contact the Maintenance Department.