

Trump National Protects Endangered Birds

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When the LPGA's professional golfers tee off September 30 in the LPGA tournament at the Trump National, the new course on Los Angeles' Palos Verdes Peninsula will have already recorded one major achievement.

Cut from one of the region's most environmentally-sensitive areas, Trump National includes 125 acres of restored coastal sage scrub in which the population of the federally-listed, threatened Coastal California gnatcatcher is actually growing. Breeding pairs of gnatcatchers have increased from 4 to 15 and more than 205 fledglings have been raised since the restoration began in the late 1990s.

"The course now exports young gnatcatchers to habitats in other areas on the peninsula," said Mike Sweesy, project manager with Dudek & Associates, an Encinitas, California, environmental services firm that developed the course's habitat restoration program. "Even during the 2003 drought when other gnatcatcher populations were decreasing dramatically, the population at Trump National held steady."

While the gnatcatcher has been the bete noire of California developers, Trump National succeeded at blending land development with environmental protection. "It shows that economically-viable development can co-exist with environmentally-sensitive resources through appropriate design," Sweesy said.

The gnatcatcher is at risk of extinction due to a decline in natural coastal sage scrub habitat. Of the 2.5 million acres of coastal sage scrub that once stretched from Ventura to the Mexican border, only 10 percent remains. Trump National sits in the middle of one of the last habitats for the bird in the Los Angeles Basin.

The restoration plan began in the mid-1990s when regulators told the course's original owners they would have to show they could restore coastal sage scrub before construction began. The owners brought in Dudek biologists and landscape architects, who successfully demonstrated a restoration program.

Donald Trump bought the course out of bankruptcy in 2002, renamed it Trump National Golf Club and closed it in August 2004 for reconstruction and renovation.

Throughout course development, Sweesy walked the rolling hills to map out what to plant in areas sometimes as small as 20 square feet to accommodate micro-topographical features. The most challenging part of the design was restoring 20 acres on the slopes and out-of-play areas passed daily by golfers.

"Conventional wisdom before this project held that these sites would have been too compromised for the gnatcatcher to thrive," Sweesy said.