

# Lessons learned in 25 years with STMA, Part IV

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**L**esson #11: **Keep records for ALL field activities/events and develop a field rating system.** The only way to convince administrators and field user groups that you are experiencing too much traffic to maintain reasonable grass is to provide them with solid information about traffic levels and field performance. Sensible information that relates field activity to field conditions usually gets a reduction or rotation in activity or more resources to manage the excessive traffic; both will have a positive impact on your field management program. The message here is quit crying about field over-use and work with those involved to develop a reasonable plan for effective change. Here is more information on counting events/activities and rating your fields.

<http://turfggrass.hort.iastate.edu/extension/EGtrafficsurvey.pdf>

<http://www.greenmediaonline.com/st/2004/0407/0407qa.asp>

<http://www.greenmediaonline.com/st/1998/1098/1098qa.asp>

**Lesson #12: Concentrate your resources by implementing a site specific management program.**

Identify high traffic areas on each field and concentrate resources on those areas to provide a better return on your investment. High traffic areas of a football field (10,000 sq.ft. center plus sidelines) that require more resources are usually 6 to 10 times smaller than the entire area in and around the field (60,000 to 100,000 sq.ft). If you are treating the entire field area with one management program then you can reduce input from lower traffic areas and increase input on higher traffic areas. High traffic areas require additional coring, seeding, fertility, topdressing, and specific herbicides that don't harm seedling turf. Amendments such as sand, calcined clay, compost, and crumb rubber are affordable if you concentrate your resources to manage the "field within your field."

**Lesson #13: Rotate activity on overused fields.**

Develop a program where one or more fields are completely taken out of play for at least 1 year. Impossible you say? Then try this approach: Identify your fields that are

overused. As an example, let's use four soccer fields that are intensely used spring and fall. All attempts at coring, drill seeding, and other reestablishment practices have not produced acceptable grass cover because there has not been a sufficient period of time for grass to reestablish and mature. Take time to explain to parents, coaches, and others that this 1-year period of rest is important so that a field can be used continuously for the next 3 or 4 years.

Don't announce at the beginning of the soccer season that you want to renovate a field and that it won't be available for play. Get involved instead in scheduling for the entire soccer league. Find out when they have their first meeting so that you can present your plan for providing a safer facility by removing one field each year for renovation. Try not to accept any period less than 1 year for resting the field. Explain that 95% grass cover may occur 2 months after seeding but it will take at least 1 year for plants to produce enough biomass to form a protective mat of grass that is more traffic tolerant and shock absorbing. Insist that a game schedule for next season be produced without using the field that will be rested for renovation. Once the schedule has been set without using the "rested" field then you're home free. If you approach the planning committee after the game/practice schedules are set, they will be reluctant to change the schedule to rest a field. Next year repeat the process; play on three fields and rest one field. This 3-year rotation will improve the playing conditions of all fields.

Sodding is preferred when reestablishing the "rested" field. Don't compromise the renovation process by sodding and then allowing play before the full 1-year rest period is over. Stick with the plan so that your committee can develop a consistent policy for game and field scheduling. Take a positive approach by letting the committee know that they will be directly affecting field conditions by using their expertise to make the schedule work with one less field. Acknowledge that their dollars spent on seed, coring, and other materials will be more effective since the "rested" field won't wear out as fast as the others. Avoid using the comment, "It will sure make my job easier," since some may perceive that to be a sign of laziness. What is actually meant is that your time and resources spent on renovation will be the same, but the field performance will be substantially improved. ■