



**USGA** COURSE CONSULTING SERVICE

# Site Visit Report

## **Meadowlark Golf Club** Huntington Beach, California

Visit Date: March 20, 2026

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**USGA** GreenSection

# Executive Summary

The USGA Green Section was recently engaged by the Southern California Golf Association (SCGA) to perform a golf course evaluation of Meadowlark Golf Course. It was a pleasure to spend the day with Mr. Sipe and Mr. Randall on March 20, 2026. Mr. Fitzgerald from the SCGA was kind enough to spend time with the group as well. We spent the day reviewing the golf course infrastructure and touring the turf care facility as well as the golf course. This report is intended to provide a needs assessment summary of each of the primary golf course areas and golf course infrastructure.

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# Drainage

## General Observations

### 1. Poorly Drained Soils and Flat Ground

On many of the holes on this golf course, there is very little surface fall and the soils, although deep, are very slow to drain. It is likely that the soils drain at less than 1/10 inch per hour. During rain events or even heavy irrigation, water consistently puddles in low depressions on fairways and roughs.

- Where there are low areas across the golf course (Nos. 10, 12 and 14 are good examples), water accumulates, sometimes 3 or 4 feet deep. Water must be pumped through a labor-intensive effort to move water off turf areas, off cart paths, and into storm drains.
- While the flooding is temporary in the context of a year-long golf season, the impact from the flooding is significant, and that impact was quite evident on the day of the course tour. In low areas, there is thin turf density, and we measured elevated salts despite good-quality irrigation water sourced from an onsite well.
- In addition to bare and thin turf in low areas, the same was found in localized depressions in fairways. With no surface fall, water impounds in localized depressions and is very slow to drain. The turf suffers from lack of oxygen and, once dry, continues to struggle from high salinity after the water evaporates.



The bare turf in these low areas on No. 10 (left) and No. 12 (right) are just a few examples where turf has thinned due to suffocation while under water and subsequent struggle with elevated salinity.



This low area on No. 14 is just 20 yards in front of the green, making this area unplayable. The soil (right) consists of heavy clay which is very slow to drain.



There are bare turf areas on flat ground in addition to low areas. These bare/thin areas are also a result of extended ponding and isolated high salinity.

## Recommendations

### 1. Comprehensive Drainage Installation

Perhaps the most important capital improvement project for this golf course is a comprehensive drainage system.

- None of the USGA Green Section team are civil engineers and therefore we are not equipped to design a system for you. However, in working with many other golf courses, it is clear from our experience at Meadowlark that drainage is needed throughout the property, not just in strategic areas. Furthermore, it is likely that the drainage design should include infrastructure such as large hurricane holes or even onsite retention basins where you're able to move and store water.
- With the above in mind, it is recommended to work with a local civil engineering company and golf course drainage contractor that can design and install a course-wide system. It is recommended to meet with several drainage companies to discuss designing a comprehensive golf course drainage system.

- I would like to be clear that this is absolutely not a drainage system that should be installed with in-house labor. Installing a herringbone drainage network in low-lying areas will not fix the problem. This golf course needs a comprehensive drainage system that will capture water as it moves downslope from areas adjacent to fairways and roughs, as well as a consistent network of subsurface drainage and surface drainage across fairways, roughs, and green surrounds. I am afraid this is an expensive endeavor, but one that is sorely needed for this property. As previously mentioned, I am confident that this project will have a tremendous positive impact on the golf experience at Meadowlark Golf Club.
- One of the companies I would suggest meeting with is [Turf Drainage Company of America](#). I have worked with this team in the past. They are extremely knowledgeable and have a tremendous reputation. This team designed and installed the drainage at Northridge Country Club in the Sacramento area over 20 years ago. That system is still working well. They're currently working with The Olympic Club for the drainage system on the Ocean Golf Course. Other companies I'd recommend reaching out to include XDG, Golf Preservations (Sampson Bailey 606-499-2732). Finally, Turf Rehab is another good option.
- You may also want to have a conversation with your preferred golf course construction company as they will install drainage; however, the design in your case is just as important as the quality of installation.
- Ideally, the drainage installation would coincide with irrigation system replacement; however, I would place more emphasis on the drainage design and installation.

## Putting Greens

### Turfgrass Health and Quality Observations

#### 1. Turf Type

The putting greens consist of a combination of *Poa annua*. There is some creeping bentgrass, but the primary population is *Poa annua*. The *Poa annua* performs well in this climate so close to the ocean.



The turfgrass composition on greens consists primarily of *Poa annua* with some creeping bentgrass.

## 2. Soil Profile

The greens were built in 1922, which is rare in the West. The greens were built to the “push-up” style where native soil was “pushed up” to form the shape of the greens. Fortunately, many years of sand topdressing have produced an improved soil profile. However, the depth of the sand/organic matter is variable among greens.

- On some greens, the depth of the improved soil is approximately 8 inches (such as observed on No. 10) while on other greens, the depth is only about 6 inches. It is on the shallower greens (such as on No. 13) where water will at times accumulate in the hole (cup). There is no subsurface drainage. However, the greens are sloped and therefore surface drainage is good – other than where there are raised collars.
- While these are not modern-built greens with 12 inches of rootzone mix, gravel and subsurface drainage, they generally perform well, meaning turf is healthy and the surface performance meets expectations.
- Most greens have a raised collar that impedes proper water flow off the surface.



The improved profile with sand and organic matter is deep on No. 10 green (left) at 9 inches but much shallower on No. 13 green (right) at about 6 inches.

## 3. Plant Health

The *Poa annua* turf is healthy in these greens. The putting surfaces were dense. It is clear there is ample nutrient availability given the greens have good color.

- There are localized areas of turf thinning, although these are minor. The majority of these areas are isolated along green perimeters where there is severe slope, and the damage is caused by the mower tires/reels when mowing the perimeter (clean-up) pass.
- A measure of turf health is the shear strength test. This test uses a shear strength tester to assess the surface strength of greens. A threshold of 12 Newton meters (Nm) is used as an indicator of weak turf. The average shear strength values on these greens was 15 Nm, which is excellent and confirms the greens are healthy.

## 4. Turf Quality

The turf is healthy and the roots extend to approximately 3 inches.

## 5. Stress Factors

With 85,000 rounds of golf, one of the main stress factors is traffic, especially with such small green surfaces. There are limited hole locations due to steep slope, which further concentrates traffic. Despite this, the greens have performed well for many years and there is no history of significant turf loss even during the summer months. Furthermore, the greens have good surface ball roll conditions, and the green speed is acceptable on a routine basis. One other stress factor is rapid blight disease in the late summer months. It was noted that appropriate plant protectants are applied to mitigate any damage.

## 6. Collar Dams

Collar dams were observed around nearly all of the putting greens. The elevated collars, otherwise known as collar dams, result after years of sand topdressing, sand splash from greenside bunkers, and organic matter production. These collar dams effectively trap water on the greens, which causes additional stress in low-lying areas.

## 7. Drainage or Flooding Concerns

The greens have from 6 to 9 inches of a rootzone that has accumulated over the years with sand topdressing, and this zone of the profile appears to drain well. However, there is a native heavy clay layer residing beneath the sand and organic matter layer which is very slow to drain, and there are no subsurface drains in greens. It was reported that there may have been a few greens where sand channels were installed, but this was only done in isolated areas.

# Playing Quality Observations

## 1. Performance Metrics

We utilized the USGA GS3 device to measure green speed, smoothness, and trueness on No. 11 green.

- Green speed was recorded at 9 feet 8 inches.
- Smoothness was recorded at 3.62.
- Trueness was recorded at 0.96.

Green speed of almost 10 feet was right within expectations, and it should be noted that dew was present during the test, which likely slowed the test down by 5 to 6 inches. Smoothness readings less than 5 are considered acceptable, and trueness readings less than 1 are considered acceptable. Smoothness indicates the ball deviation in a vertical motion, and trueness indicates the deviation of the ball horizontally as it rolls across the surface. It is clear from these readings that green speed was acceptable and ball roll conditions were smooth and true on the day of the visit. While this is just one snapshot of the greens on one day, in discussions with everyone present, it is clear that the greens perform well throughout the year.

# Recommendations

## 1. Improving Drainage

With regard to making recommendations for the long-term needs assessment for these greens, I do not foresee the need to rebuild despite the push-up style greens. This climate is favorable and the water quality is acceptable, thus the greens have been healthy for many years, and I expect them to continue in that fashion. We did recommend utilizing a Drill & Fill® machine on greens, ideally once per year, which I believe will help with drainage.

# Tees

## Turfgrass Health and Quality Observations

### 1. Turf Composition

The tees consist of a combination of kikuyugrass, bermudagrass, and perennial ryegrass. Kikuyugrass is the dominant species.

### 2. Predominant Soil Type

The tees were constructed with 5 to 6 inches of sand on top of native soil. A considerable amount of thatch has accumulated on top of the sand.



The rootzone in tees is comprised of about 5 inches of sand and organic material on top of the native soil (No. 10 tee rootzone and tee surface shown here).

### 3. Plant Health

In general, turf health on tees was good with dense turf. There are localized areas where there are concentrated divots and visual turf wear due to high play volume and concentrated traffic due to crowned tees.

### 4. Turf Quality

In general, the kikuyugrass on tees is in good health, with a healthy and established root system.

### 5. Stress Factors

The primary stress on tees is a combination of high play volume and limited area to place tee markers due to the heavily crowned tees.

### 6. Tee Size and Uniformity

With 85,000 rounds of golf, the tees are generally too small and have too much of a crown in the middles to spread out golfer traffic.

## Playing Quality Observations

### 1. Yardage

There are three teeing options for Meadowlark golfers to enjoy. At slightly over 4,300 yards, the yellow tees are well placed. However, there are a few holes where the yellow tees can likely be moved forward to improve the experience for the slower-swing-speed player.

## Recommendations

### 1. Tee Renovation

For the long-term golf course experience at Meadowlark, a tee renovation is highly recommended. More specifically, teeing areas should be enlarged, especially for the white tees on many holes, and all the tees need to be releveled and resurfaced. As a guideline moving forward, tees should be leveled about every ten years.

## Fairways and Rough

### Turfgrass Health and Quality Observations

#### 1. Turf Composition

The fairways consist primarily of kikuyugrass, but there are localized areas with common bermudagrass and localized areas with perennial ryegrass. There is a greater concentration of perennial ryegrass in roughs with annual overseeding.



The kikuyugrass has poor turf density on No. 12 fairway as a result of anoxic conditions and elevated salinity due to flooding.

#### 2. Dominant Soil Type

The soil is dominated by clay. This soil drains very slowly, likely only 1/10 inch per hour or less. The soil texture appears to be consistent from the surface to several feet deep. Where there is moisture, the kikuyugrass roots are deep and healthy. Where there are dry areas, the clay becomes extremely hard and compacted. The soil type makes for difficult irrigation management given the very slow infiltration rate.

Clay dominates the soil texture in fairways, and it appears to be several feet deep or more. Where there is adequate moisture, roots are deep in this soil, but it is extremely slow to drain.



### 3. Drainage or Flooding Concerns

The golf course has endured a significant amount of flooding and localized puddling over the past seven years. Even though the golf course had not seen rain in three weeks, there were still puddles on the day of our course visit. Even though the golf course has mostly dried out, the remnants of the flooding and ponding are present with thin and bare turf areas. As stated under the drainage section of this report, the lack of drainage and frequent flooding, ponding, and damage to turf are significant problems for the health of the fairways and roughs.

### 4. Turf Health and Quality

Turf health was generally very poor in areas that impound water. Where there is high ground, the turf is healthy. The overseeded ryegrass in the roughs generally performs very well, and there is a healthy and comingled mixture of ryegrass and understory bermudagrass. It is clear the kikuyugrass performs well at this site and, in fact, is the turf that grows most aggressively.

### 5. Stress Factors

While there is some localized shade stress across the golf course, by far the biggest stress factor is flooding and prolonged exposure to ponding. We did measure elevated salinity in low areas, but that is merely a symptom of water sitting, evaporating, and leaving salts behind. If the drainage were adequate, the water and the salts it contains would move through the system and I do not think there would be problems with salinity stress.

### 6. Cart Paths

Cart paths are continuous, and the construction material is concrete. Repair work was completed on the back nine, but it was noted that there is work to be completed on the front nine cart paths.

## Playing Quality Observations

### 1. Fair to Poor Playing Quality

The playing quality of fairways and roughs is fair to poor. It is clear that the turf suffers from suffocation from frequent flooding and ponding during the fall, winter, and spring months. It was reported that the turf performance is far better during the summer months, which is not surprising.

## Recommendations

### 1. Drainage

I will refer back to the drainage section of this report. The primary recommendation for the long-term health of this golf course and to significantly improve the golfer experience throughout the year will be to install a course-wide drainage system designed by a qualified engineer and drainage designer. Given that kikuyugrass is so successful on this golf course, I do not see the need to change turf varieties.

## Bunkers

### General Observations

#### 1. Number and Age

There are 20 bunkers across the golf course, which is a lower number than most. This is excellent and aligns with the golf course expectations.

#### 2. Construction Technique

It was reported that bunker sand was replaced in 2015 and drainage was installed. There is no liner in the bunkers.

#### 3. General Conditions

The bunkers are in fair to good condition.

- In general, the sand is free of rocks. Sand depth was measured at 5 to 6 inches, which is generally sufficient to provide good playability. It was noted that the agronomy team have been routinely adding sand to improve playability.
- The bunkers drain poorly. When there are rain events or heavy irrigation, it is common to see water standing in bunkers.
- The bunker edges have grown in elevation, and the original perimeters have been lost. There is a significant amount of thatch and organic matter and sand splash that has accumulated in bunker surrounds.



The bunker lips are likely 2 to 3 feet higher than their original elevation. Sand depth was measured at approximately 6 inches (right).

#### 4. Maintenance Operations

The bunkers are raked four times per week with a mechanical bunker rake. The edges are line-trimmed as necessary. With such a small crew, it is difficult to attend to detail work in and around bunkers.

#### 5. Estimate of Position and Life Cycle

The bunkers have far exceeded their expected useful service life. Typically, bunkers need sand replacement every 10 to 13 years and need renovation about every 20 years.

### Playing Quality Observations

#### 1. General Conditions

In general, the playing quality of the bunkers is acceptable. However, with lips that have grown up in size considerably, the bunkers are now much deeper than the original design, which makes it difficult for players and very likely slows the pace of play. The bunkers hold water on a routine basis, which detracts from aesthetics and playing quality.

### Recommendations

#### 1. Renovation

It is recommended to consider renovating all of the bunkers on the golf course. There are only 20 bunkers, which is excellent, but some bunkers are quite large.

- You may consider reducing the size of some of the bunkers simply to reduce maintenance costs and the costs of sand replacement.
- It will also be critical to lower the elevation of the bunker lips to try and recapture the original design.
- Finally, the drainage should be audited and fixed to improve the ability of the bunkers to exit water from the system.

## Irrigation System

### General Observations

#### 1. System Age

Irrigation infrastructure was installed in 1994 and therefore the system is roughly 32 years old. This is the age at which most golf courses will replace their irrigation system.

#### 2. Pipe

The pipe is 26 years old, and it is good to report that there are infrequent pipe breaks, approximated at four to five per year, which is minimal.

#### 3. Sprinklers

It was noted that the team replace sprinklers as needed, replacing the old 700 series sprinklers with the 800 series. Sprinklers are leveled as needed, but minimal labor is available for this practice.

#### 4. Valves

It was reported that, in general, the lateral and main line valves are working properly.

#### 5. Satellites and No Central Irrigation Computer

The satellites are in very poor condition and there is no central irrigation computer. This makes for very labor-intensive methods to change irrigation scheduling, and it is very rare in this day and age to see golf courses with no central control.

#### 6. Pump Station

The pump station is original, and it is good to report that it is in good shape and is routinely maintained. The team have replaced motors as needed. The skid and the pump station are in decent to good condition. The pump station is enclosed in a protective building with adequate air circulation.



The pump station is in good working condition and is in an acceptable enclosure.

#### 7. System Deficiencies

It was good to hear there are no major lateral or mainline breaks at this time; however, given that the system is 32 years old, you can expect repairs to become more frequent in the next few years.

- One of the biggest deficiencies is the lack of a central irrigation control computer, which I would place high priority on upgrading the system as soon as possible.
- Additionally, there are multiple sprinklers controlled on one valve which, especially with the slow-draining clay soil, makes it extremely difficult to manage fairways and roughs to optimize soil moisture consistency.

## Recommendations

### 1. System Replacement

I'm afraid that a new irrigation system should be a high priority for this golf course along with the drainage plan.

- Many courses will opt to install irrigation on nine holes one year and nine holes the next, but some will choose to mobilize a contractor for five or six months to complete the installation over the whole golf course and get it all done in one year.
- Another option will be to install the system with the golf course open for play and simply close one hole at a time to complete the installation. This will prolong the construction process and is more expensive, but some golf courses prefer this option because they can keep the golf course open for play.
- An alternative to replacing the entire system is to run new wire to sprinklers from new satellite controllers and install a central computer. This option is still expensive, and when the frequency of pipe failure increases, pipe replacement will be necessary which may occur soon after completing the wire/satellite installation.

# Labor, Equipment and Turf Care Facility

## Observations and Recommendations

### 1. Labor

There are currently only six full-time staff and one part-time staff for Meadowlark. This includes all employees, the golf course superintendent, assistant and equipment manager. It is common for municipal golf courses to have lower labor budgets compared to higher-end public or private golf courses, but I will say this – full-time staff of only six is very low.

### 2. Equipment

The age and working condition of the equipment at Meadowlark is variable. Most equipment has been used extensively, and the hour meters indicate over 5,000 or even 6,000 hours. Many courses will try to replace equipment when it accumulates around 3,500 to 4,000 hours.

- The equipment manager spends a great deal of time repairing equipment and very little time maintaining equipment. This is the opposite of what courses that produce quality conditions day in and day out do.
- Inoperable equipment negatively impacts turf health and playing conditions and also significantly impairs operational efficiency.
- The antiquated equipment also sends a message to the turf care team that this is an old golf course where the ownership may not fully appreciate the value of the staff and the quality of conditions on the golf course. The culture of the team is negatively impacted by the antiquated equipment.
- Finally, the bedknife and reel grinders at the golf course are antiquated and currently not working.

### 3. Turf Care Facility

The turf care facility is not a welcoming environment for staff. The break room and bathroom are in poor condition, and the entire facility does not provide an example of the quality of work expected on the golf course. Please review the following article on [The Fundamentals of a Modern Maintenance Facility](#) for more on this topic.

## Practice Facility

### Turfgrass Health and Quality Observations

#### 1. Practice Facility Assets

The practice facility includes an area outfitted with synthetic turf mats for hitting with limited flight balls, given the elevated tee and limited space. The netting in general is in good condition and seems to be adequately designed to protect the surrounding areas from flying golf balls. There is one large putting green along with a secondary putting green and chipping green. There is often a waiting list to get a space on the practice facility to hit balls.

## 2. Turf Quality

The floor of the practice facility is mostly bare ground, given the frequent flooding and years ago, there were water restrictions that forced the team to turn off the water.

## Recommendations

### 1. Proposed Improvements

The course leadership expressed the idea to install some form of decomposed granite or soil on the floor of the driving range and install synthetic turf targets. In addition, there was a discussion about using autonomous equipment to pick the golf balls from the range. We are certainly supportive of this idea as it would improve the aesthetics. Our initial observations indicate autonomous equipment is working well and helping to shift labor to other areas.

# Summary of Course Conditions and Areas for Improvement

## Strengths

### 1. Climate

The climate at this site is moderate. There are very few time periods where the climate is very cold or very hot, which helps alleviate stress and is conducive to growing both kikuyugrass and *Poa annua* on the putting greens. As such, there is no near-term need to modify the turfgrass varieties grown at the site.

### 2. Strong Kikuyugrass Base

There is a healthy and strong kikuyugrass base in tees, fairways, and roughs. If you were able to install drainage to mitigate the flooding in ponded water and improve irrigation, I'm very optimistic course-wide conditions would improve.

### 3. Healthy *Poa annua* Greens

Although the greens are not filled with standard 12-inch rootzone gravel and drainage, they have performed well for many years and there's no immediate need to rebuild greens.

## Weaknesses

### 1. Flood Basin and Poorly Draining Soils

One of the biggest challenges at this site is the combination of multiple flooding events per year, poorly drained soils, and localized areas that pond water even with routine irrigation. This not only deteriorates turf health but also creates a poor playing experience.

### 2. Irrigation Infrastructure at End of Useful Life/Antiquated Design

There is very little flexibility with this irrigation system given that there are multiple sprinklers per valve and there is no central irrigation control. It takes 90 to 120 minutes just to turn the golf course to make scheduling changes, and these changes are very basic compared to courses that have central control. Furthermore, the system is at the end of its useful service life and the leadership at this facility need to look at irrigation system replacement.

## Opportunities for Improvement

### 1. Drainage Design

By far the biggest area for improvement for this facility will be to utilize a qualified contractor to install a course-wide drainage system. This should be done in coordination with plans to install a new irrigation system. Fortunately, with HDPE pipe, these systems have much longer longevity and experts suggest the pipe may last 80 years or more.

### 2. Turf Care Facility and Equipment Upgrades

There is also an opportunity to upgrade the turf care facility as well as the equipment, which would improve the operational efficiency of the operation and elevate the standards. It would also help you attract more employees. Ideally this golf course would set a budget to employ 10 to 12 fulltime staff.

## Closing Comments

It was a pleasure to have an opportunity to conduct our first USGA Course Consulting Service visit to Meadowlark Golf Course and spend the day with Mr. Fitzgerald from the SCGA and Mr. Sipe and Mr. Randall from Meadowlark. This golf course is truly a gem in this area and clearly an important part of the local community, as well as an important open space that attracts wildlife, improves air quality, and is an important recreational outlet for both locals and guests from outside the area. I am hopeful that this report helps to guide your long-term decisions to preserve the integrity of this important asset to the community. Thank you for your support of the USGA Green Section. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Respectfully submitted,



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# USGA Green Section

## Turfgrass and Environmental Research

The [USGA Green Section](#) appreciates your support of the Course Consulting Service. First started in 1953, the Course Consulting Service provides unbiased assessments of golf facilities to optimize resources and reduce consumption of critical resources. The proceeds from the Course Consulting Service directly support the USGA's annual \$2 million investment in [turfgrass and environmental research](#), which provides an estimated [\\$2 billion annual benefit to the U.S. golf industry](#). Follow the QR Code for more information.



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