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Trump's tree work festers in Loudoun

Golf club, county, environmentalists spar over Potomac shoreline

BY ANNIE GOWEN

Call them Trump's stumps.

Last spring and summer, workers at Trump National Golf Club in Loudoun County chopped down more than 400 trees along the Potomac River so their golfers could have a better view of the water.

Eight months later, the fate of the mile-long stretch of shoreline — where migratory birds once nested and bald eagles perched to fish — remains a source of conflict among the Trump Organization, local officials and environmentalists, who are dickering over how to stabilize the riverbank and what

to do with the hundreds of stumps left behind.

"It's kind of unbelievable," said Mark Haynes, an Arlington County energy consultant who sits on the board of the Potomac Conservancy. "They replaced the trees with a huge flagpole with the American flag flying up there. Which struck me as sad. It's kind of in-your-face now."

Donald Trump — "Apprentice" star, real estate mogul and impossible-to-ignore potential presidential candidate — has developed 11 luxury golf courses around the world over the years, leaving a trail of happy golfers but angry residents and environmentalists in his wake. He infuriated neighbors in California for trying to plant trees to shield pedestrians from flying golf balls and in Northern Virginia for taking them out.

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Golfers' view trumps trees at Loudoun club

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His fight with five gritty Scots who refused to move from the stone cottages standing in the way of his \$1.6 billion golf course in Scotland inspired a film, "You've Been Trumped," that played to sold-out crowds at Toronto's documentary film festival this month. (Choice scenes: Trump worrying over his hair at a news conference on a windswept bluff and accusing one of the holdouts of living "like a pig.")

Such dramas will provide plenty of fodder for those seeking to delve into Trump's past should he decide to run for president in the coming weeks.

"I have a great environmental record," said Trump, who last month purchased one of Virginia's best-known wineries at a foreclosure auction for \$6.2 million. "I have a record that, in my opinion, everybody would love."

Well, not everybody. Environmentalists note the tree cutting, the mogul's affection for using private jets and his call for Al Gore to be stripped of his Nobel Peace Prize as evidence to the contrary.

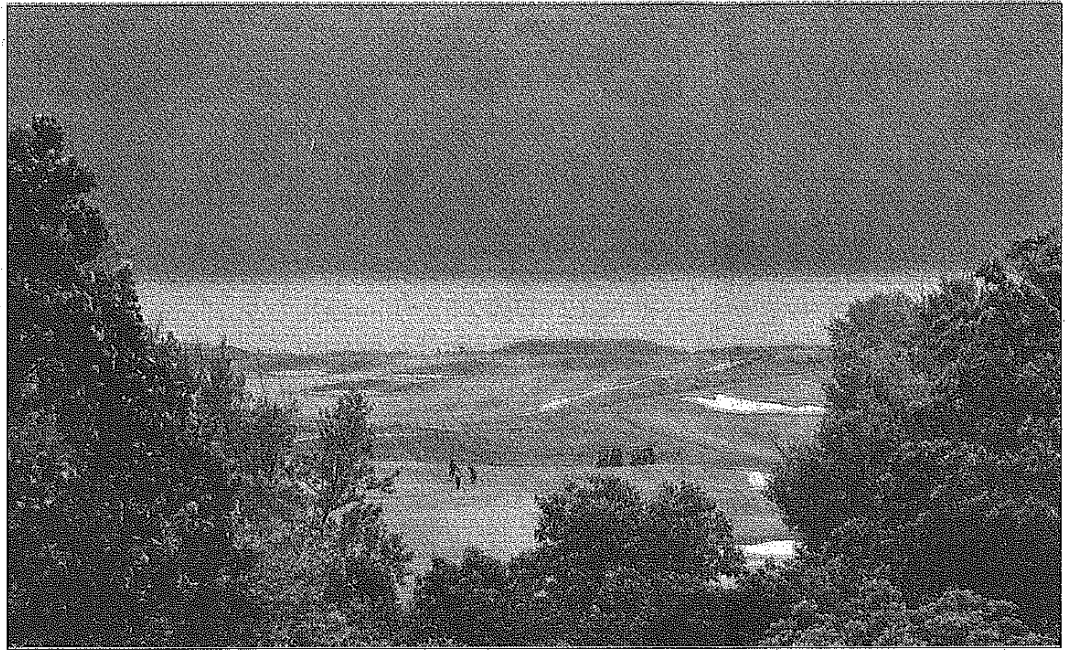
"He likes to pretend he's an environmentalist because of the landscaping on his golf courses, but at the end of the day, it seems he's the only one that actually believes that," said Heather Taylor-Miesle, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's Action Fund. "His brand of environmentalism is only for the wealthy and elite."

'Like eco-Disney'

About a decade ago, Trump bought a bucolic estate about 45 miles from New York City that was once owned by the disgraced automaker John DeLorean. In 2004, he opened Trump National Golf Club at Bedminster in New Jersey, a place he thinks is so lovely that he wants to be buried there (although plans to build a mausoleum on the first tee have been shelved.)

As the Trump Organization has expanded the Bedminster Club from 18 holes to 36, it has often touted its bird sanctuary — which won an environmental award — and network of nature trails as proof of its good stewardship of the property.

"It's like eco-Disney up there," said Cindy Ehrenclou, the executive director of the Upper Raritan Watershed Association, a watchdog group. But the 69 million gallons of water needed each year to



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The Trump National Golf Club in Loudoun County cut down hundreds of trees along the Potomac River to improve golfers' views

maintain the course has strained the local aquifer, Ehrenclou said.

And, as in Loudoun, mature trees have quietly disappeared.

On May 6, New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection cited Trump National Golf in Bedminster for a string of violations, including cutting trees and brush and disturbing wetlands.

Most of the environmental work on Trump's golf courses has been overseen by Ed Russo, 65, a Key West retiree who was once the Bedminster planning board chairman.

Russo, whom Trump calls a "highly respected environmentalist," lived in an old Victorian farmhouse on the 500-acre Bedminster property when DeLorean owned it. During that time, he fell so in love with the land — 500 rolling acres of apple trees, hayfields and paddocks in the middle of New Jersey's hunt country — that he buried a firetruck and several other used vehicles on it in the admittedly nutty hope it would make the parcel unappetizing to investors.

"You know, you live on a piece of property, you want to protect it," Russo said. "Golf was something we didn't want."

Then, in 2002, Trump came calling, asking Russo to clean up the property he had once helped pollute, and Russo agreed.

Russo, who is every bit as blunt and outspoken as his boss, said that Trump has given him an

"open checkbook" and "has supported every crazy environmental initiative I've ever advanced. He deserves a big pat on the back."

Russo's plans often go against the grain of conventional scientific wisdom and soil conservation practice. In Loudoun, for example, he said that the trees were actually causing erosion, rather than preventing it.

And on the northeastern coast of Scotland, where Trump is building what he says is going to be "the greatest golf course in the world," Russo has pushed for stabilizing sand dunes over the objections of Scottish scientists. They've called the moving sand dune ecosystem one of the country's greatest natural treasures, akin to Scotland's own Amazon rain forest.

Russo calls that "baloney."

Shoreline dispute

In Loudoun, officials said they objected to the removal of the American elms, green ashes and black locusts when Trump's people approached them with their plan last spring, according to Danny Davis, the county administrator's chief of staff. But there was nothing they could do to prevent it.

Unlike Fairfax County and several other local jurisdictions, Loudoun's shoreline is not protected by the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act. On Tuesday, the Loudoun

Board of Supervisors is set to debate whether to create its own 75-foot buffer that would protect the county's remaining stretches of shoreline.

In a telephone interview, Trump defended the removal of the trees, saying it was legal and that his organization spent "tens of thousands of dollars" cleaning up the trash and debris along the shoreline after he bought the 800-acre course in 2009.

And he doesn't shy away from saying the motivating factor was the pretty view for his club's members, who pay \$75,000 to join.

"It was done so that people utilizing the services of the club — of which there are 1,000 members, it's a very successful club — could have unobstructed views of the river, and because it was an environmental enhancement," Trump said. "The trees that were taken down were in terrible condition."

The two sides have talked for months and have yet to agree on a formal erosion control plan for the area. The county would like the Trump group to replant some of the trees or at least woody shrubs, but Russo has balked at doing so, saying he prefers to create a hardy grassland habitat for birds.

"At this point, we would like to see trees, sure," Davis said. "But we understand we may not get that in the end."

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