



GEO Certified®

GEO Certified® Report **Ähtärin Golf**

Prepared by independent verifier Pentti Viluksela

Certified by GEO Foundation: 2025
Recertification due: 2028

GEO Certified®

 **GEO
Foundation**
Sustainability in and through golf

“The golf club is carefully maintaining the site, which features a varied landscape rich in wildlife. Many out-of-play areas have been naturalised and now provide habitat for numerous bird species. Deer, moose and fox can be seen in the forests. Minimal use of chemicals helps to support the wildlife. Hybrid and robotic mowers and efficient irrigation system improve resource efficiency. Many of the club activities are run by volunteers. I'm looking forward to seeing the results of robotic mower testing, updated rescue plan and the establishment of sustainability and environmental communication and dialogue with golfers and other stakeholders.”

Pentti Viluksela
(GEO accredited independent verifier)



Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Dalian Ähtärin Golf has successfully achieved GEO Certified® status for its outstanding work to foster nature, conserve resources and support the community.

GEO Certified® is the most respected certification for golf, based on a credibly and transparently developed modern sustainability Standard of best practice.

Dalian Ähtär in Golf has:

1. Met the required certification criteria for sustainable golf operations
2. Successfully completed the official third-party verification process
3. Successfully passed the final evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd. (autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation)

GEO agreed with the conclusions of the official verification report, that, having achieved all mandatory criteria; and with specific Continual Improvement Points (CIP) set for the future and Critical CIP's (CCIPs) to be reviewed at recertification, Dalian Ähtärin Golf should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Dalian Ähtärin Golf can therefore claim a position as a leader in advancing sustainability in golf – making important contributions in protecting nature, conserving resources and strengthening communities.

The GEO Certified® Report that follows comments on the actions undertaken against the criteria, as observed by the independent verifier during the assurance process.

Certification is nearly always the result of a dedicated team effort resulting in many practical and valuable social and environmental results around the golf course, maintenance facility and clubhouse. These dedication and leadership qualities are an important part of ensuring the resilience of the golf facility and the golf industry into the future and also as part of society's wider effort to pull together for people and planet.

We congratulate all involved.

Jonathan Smith
Founder and Executive Director, GEO Foundation
GEO Certification Ltd. Board Member

Kelli Jerome
Executive Director, GEO Foundation

Carole Kerrey
Director, Certification and Credibility,
GEO Certification Ltd.



Verification and Certification

Verification

The official third-party audit was carried out by an independent verifier, accredited by GEO to undertake verifications of golf facilities applying for certification.

Verification involves reviewing practices and data, using the International Voluntary Standard for Sustainable Golf Operations as the guide to ensure comprehensive and consistent evaluation of performance. A detailed verification report is submitted for evaluation by GEO Certification Ltd, a subsidiary of GEO Foundation.

Certification

GEO Certification Ltd, an autonomous subsidiary of GEO Foundation [both not-for-profit entities], undertook a full review of all content submitted through the OnCourse® online platform and the report submitted by the verifier, ensuring:

- Comprehensiveness – activities undertaken touched on all elements of the Standard
- Consistency – that the verification approach was balanced, well weighted and with consistent depth of evaluation across each theme
- Accuracy - matching the verification report with evidence submitted by the golf facility to ensure statements and claims were accurate

GEO Foundation is an international not-for-profit founded to advocate, support and reward sustainability in and through golf. Over more than ten years, the group has worked collaboratively with dozens of golf industry associations and government and non-government organisations around the world, to help golf become a sustainability leader, striving for a net positive social and environmental impact. In addition to managing and assuring GEO Certified®, GEO Foundation also provides a suite of credible, practical programmes for golf facility management, new golf developments and golf tournaments called OnCourse®, often delivered in partnership with national golf bodies. Find out more at www.sustainable.golf

Credibility

GEO Certified® is part of the ISEAL Alliance, a group of the world's foremost credible certification systems including Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council and many others. GEO Foundation earned and retains full membership of the ISEAL Alliance global association following a rigorous evaluation against the ISEAL Codes of Credibility in Sustainability Standards and Certification. The ISEAL Codes cover standard-setting, assurance, and monitoring and evaluation. Find out more at www.isealalliance.org



Verifier's Report

The Sustainability Agenda for golf covers the following themes and action areas:

THEMES	ACTION AREAS
Nature	• Habitats & Biodiversity • Turfgrass management • Pollution prevention
Resources	• Water • Energy • Materials
Community	• Partnerships & Outreach • Golfing & Employment • Advocacy & Communications

Included below are the observations made by the Independent Verifier against each item in the Standard.

NATURE			
N1 Habitats and Biodiversity			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
N1.1 Understand the site and surroundings	N1.1.1 Sound understanding of the nature and landscape value of the site	General knowledge of the wildlife and habitats on the site	The site features variable landscapes, from the open views by the lake Moksunjärvi to natural hilly forests further west. Highlight: Many out-of-play areas have been turned to meadows, providing habitats for pollinators, butterflies, and birds and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape. An experienced birdwatcher golfer has identified over 80 species of birds on site. CIP: Please consider publishing the bird species survey.
	N1.1.2 Knowledge of legal designations for protected areas, habitats and species	Identify rare, protected or endangered species found on the golf course; Understand legal responsibilities for landscape protection and special area designations, if applicable	No protected species found on site. Highlight: The golf course offers many different habitats in the varied landscape. Notable bird species nesting on site and delighting golfers include common kestrel the Eurasian oystercatcher (normally a seaside species).
	N1.1.3 Sound understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site, if applicable	No archaeological, historical or cultural designations.
N1.2 Opportunities to naturalise the golf course	N1.2.1 Measures taken to identify and minimise the required area of managed turfgrass	Monitor patterns of play to identify underutilised areas of turfgrass	Out-of-play areas are identified with the input from experienced golfers. Many previously mowed areas are turned into flower meadows. Some less important bunkers have been filled or left to nature.
N1.3 Actively create and manage habitats for wildlife	N1.3.1 Projects to create and manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf	Prioritise native species of varying size and structure when planting	Dead wood and fallen trees are left in the forests to provide habitat for birds and insects.
		Prioritise native trees and shrubs when planting	Some larger forest thickets provide habitat for deer.

		Prioritise native aquatic species of varying size and structure when planting Establish mowing buffer zones next to water bodies and wetlands	Highlight: After the establishment of the golf course, the forest management strategy has been changed from commercial forest to continuous growth, where trees of variable age coexist. This has improved biodiversity and introduced the feel of natural environment.
N1.4 Conserve key species	N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species	Follow local best practice to protect or attract endangered, protected or rare species found on site	Almost 200 nesting boxes for birds have been installed on site in the recent years. The forested part of the course feature varied tree species, outcrops as well as swampy and marshy areas. Deer live on site, and elk and fox are frequently encountered, too.
N2 Turfgrass			
N2.1 Maintain optimum turfgrass and soil health	N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties adapted to climatic and other geomorphological factors	Select appropriate grass species for the climate	Creeping bentgrass and Chewings fescue on greens, Kentucky bluegrass and red fescue on tees and fairways. Annual bluegrass is naturally present as well. A plot for growing rolled turf for greens has been established on the old 18th green.
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition	No specific international requirement, however, identify course management and agronomic activities and look for continual improvements	IPM approach is used, pesticides are used as the last resort. Soil samples are taken once a year. Organic and semi-organic products are in use.
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Test and monitor soil pH; Follow legal requirements when timing fertiliser applications Ensure staff are fully qualified to use fertilisers Ensure staff use appropriate protective equipment Regularly calibrate and test applicators	Fertilisation plan is based on the soil test results. Course manager has plant protection certificate. CIP: Please consider obtaining plant protection training for another greenkeeper. Sprayer is old but well-maintained. Protective equipment, like respirator mask and goggles, is available and in use.
N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture;	IPM approach in use, chemicals used very sparingly. Topdressing applied to greens. Verti-cutting is and coring are used when necessary.

		Change hole locations frequently	Surface moisture is removed by rope, rolling of mowing.
N2.3 Use chemicals responsibly	N2.3.1 Application of chemicals only when necessary to prevent or cure defined / identified turf health issues	Identify and track pest and disease hotspots, including sensitive areas Scout the course daily for early signs and symptoms Accurately diagnose to determine the cause of weeds, pests and diseases	Most common disease is snow mould, which may usually appear from August onwards; it's often left untreated. Preventive application is done on greens before the first snow in the late autumn/early winter. Shady and moist greens are most vulnerable to disease.
	N2.3.2 Application of chemicals with full safety precautions	Use legally registered and approved products; Prefer products for the specific weed, pest or disease; Follow legal requirements; Ensure staff are fully qualified to use pesticides; Ensure staff use appropriate protective equipment; Regularly calibrate and test applicators; Dilute and dispose of leftover product on untreated areas of amenity turfgrass	Chemicals are used only when strictly necessary. Products to be used are chosen carefully for the specific purpose. The amount of leftover product is minimised; containers triple rinsed and the rinse water disposed of on suitable area.
N3 Pollution Prevention			
N3.1 Prevent pollution across the entire site	N3.1.1 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from golf course operations	Document procedures for emergency spill responses ; Retain no-spray/no-spread buffer areas next to water bodies and wetlands; Retain no-spray/no-spread buffer zones in and around ecologically sensitive areas	Emergency spill response plan confirmed. CCIP: Please update the rescue plan to cover different kinds of emergencies in course maintenance, play of golf and clubhouse operations. Buffer zones are maintained around water features. Buffer zone toward the lake Moksunjärvi is at least 10 m wide.
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure	Formal wastewater discharge agreement, if applicable	Clubhouse and maintenance facility are connected to the municipal water/sewerage network.

	pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations		Cleaning chemicals etc. are adequately stored.
	N3.1.3 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from maintenance facility operations	Wash machinery over an impermeable, leak-free surface; Mix and load pesticides and fertilisers over an impermeable, leak-free surface; Triple rinse pesticide containers and applicators	Machinery washing and chemical handling takes place on concrete surface. Machine wash bay has clippings separation net and oil/grease separation well. Wastewater is led to filtration bed as per local requirements. Hazardous substances are stored in a lockable cabinet and a separate storeroom with concrete floor and raised threshold. Regional Rescue Department carries out fire inspections every few years, covering fire safety, chemicals, fuel tanks, extinguishers etc. Report checked.
	N3.2 Safely manage hazardous substances	N3.2.1 Legal compliance in the storage, handling, application and safe disposal of all hazardous substances List of hazardous substances, made available to authorised staff; Product and material data safety sheets; Well ventilated concrete or metal building; Impermeable, leak-free flooring; Sufficient storage capacity; Spill containment kits; Secondary containment e.g., bunds or drip trays; Emergency wash area, as per local requirements (body shower and / or eye wash station); Hazardous substances safely collected by a registered company or body ; Follow any additional legal requirements	List of chemicals checked. Material safety data sheets are available digitally. CCIP: Please check periodically the links of the MSDSs and update them when needed. Chemicals are adequately stored in locked cabinet/storeroom. Spill containment materials, like absorbent mat, are available. Hazardous waste is partly collected by authorised contractor, partly taken by staff to the municipal waste centre. First aid training for staff planned for 2026. There are first-aid kits and fire extinguishers both in the maintenance facility and the clubhouse, and eye-wash bottles in the maintenance facility.
	N3.2.2 Legal compliance in the storage and handling of fuels and gases	Tank secured to a horizontal, flat, non-combustible surface;	The newly acquired fuel tank has a double-wall construction. CCIP: Please build a walled compartment for the fuel tank, as indicated in the recent fire inspection report.

		Secondary containment of fuel in the event of spills e.g. bunds and drip trays; Inspection of storage tank(s) at least quarterly, if required; Fire extinguisher in the immediate area	
N3.3 Responsibly manage waste / storm water	N3.3.1 Appropriate wastewater usage, treatment and discharge	Impermeable, leak-free surface; Treatment as per local requirements (oil, grease and / or clipping separation); Formal discharge agreement, if applicable	Wastewater from buildings discharged to the municipal sewer network. Wastewater from machine wash station is led to filtration bed after clippings and oil/grease separation.

RESOURCES

R1 Water

Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
R1.1 Minimise water demand	R1.1.1 Measures to reduce the need to consume water	Select appropriate grass species for the climate e.g., drought and disease tolerance; Target irrigation to essential playing surfaces; Prioritise native, drought tolerant species for landscaping and planting	The present grass species (see N2.1.1) are suitable for the local climatic and soil conditions. Irrigation system has been built in two stages (front nine, back nine). Hunter hardware and Bailoy control software are used. Irrigation is concentrated on greens and teeboxes.
R1.2 Maximise water efficiency	R1.2.1 Practical measures to use water more efficiently on the golf course	Schedule irrigation based on informed assessment of soil moisture and weather forecasts; Evaluate new irrigation technologies e.g., central control, precision sprinklers etc.; Provide staff training on efficient irrigation practices;	Irrigation system checked in the spring, emptied in the autumn and maintenance done as needed. Sector sprinklers and programme control are used to optimise the efficiency of irrigation. A handheld soil moisture sensor is actively used to assist in irrigation planning.

		Adjust sprinklers to playing surfaces only	
	R1.2.2 Practical measures to use water more efficiently in buildings	Monitor and record water consumption (bills, flow meter etc.); Encourage water conservation practices amongst players and staff	Water consumption data is obtained from the invoices. CIP: Please consider launching an information campaign to conserve water and electricity.
R1.3 Source water responsibly	R1.3.1 Measures towards alternative, lower quality sources of water	Water abstraction permit, if required; Report water consumption to environment agency, if required	Irrigation water taken from the nearby lake Moksunjärvi since the construction of the course. There is no documented permit nor any reporting requirements.
R2 Energy			
R2.1 Reduce energy demand	R2.1.1 Measures to reduce the amount of energy consumed in golf course maintenance	Naturalise non-playing areas to reduce mowing and other energy intensive inputs	Many areas have been naturalised, e.g. maintained rough turned into flower meadows and some bunkers filled. Additional areas are being scouted. Maintenance frequency has been reduced in some areas.
R2.2 Maximise energy efficiency	R2.2.1 Measures to use energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings	Monitor and record energy consumption (bills, meters etc.)	Energy consumption data obtained from invoices. Heating of buildings in winter has been reduced. CIP: Please consider launching an information campaign to conserve water and electricity, see R1.2.2. Highlight: Two recently acquired hybrid mowers and two robotic mowers, tested this summer, will improve resource efficiency and reduce fossil fuel consumption.
R2.3 Source energy responsibly	R2.3.1 Measures to source alternative, renewable forms of energy	Understand the energy mix of your electricity supplier; Explore possible greener energy providers	The current electricity provider can supply greener tariff electricity.
R3 Materials			
R3.1 Reduce materials demand	R3.1.1 Products and materials selection based on necessity, including	No specific international requirement, however, identify activities to reduce the demand for	Use of disposable cutlery and plates in the club café is eliminated. Use of printed scorecards and office paper has been reduced.

	opportunities for recycled, reused and locally sourced alternatives	materials and look for continual improvements	
R3.2 Purchase responsibly	R3.2.1 Commit to sustainable purchasing practices	Favour responsible, lower impact products	The club restaurant uses locally produced goods, e.g. bakery products. Red/blackcurrant plants and apple trees grow outside the clubhouse.
R3.3 Reuse and recycle	R3.3.1 Waste stream separation for maximum recycling and re-use opportunity	Put in place a recycling separation system, according to local rules and availability; Clear, simple and visible bin signage; Monitor and record weight of waste for each stream e.g. invoices, bills etc.	At present, the precise weight of different waste fractions cannot easily be obtained, because the invoicing is based on collection times, so the weight is estimated. There are bins for different waste fractions. New double bins (bottles/cans and mixed waste) will soon be installed on key locations on the course.
R3.4 Demonstrate legal compliance	R3.4.1 Compliance with all local and regional waste management regulations	Authorised waste collector for general, hazardous, industrial and green waste, if required	Waste management and contractors fulfil local requirements.

COMMUNITY			
C1 Health & Wellbeing			
Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
C1.1 Improve health and wellbeing	C1.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities	Plans in place to respond to incidents and emergencies	Health and safety reports from the service provider include risk assessments. Additional documentation provides guidelines for golfers (e.g. thunder and lightning, accidents, attacks of illness).

			CCIP: see N3.1.1. A mirror and a bell are installed in key locations to minimise risk from blind shots.
C1.2 Be open and inclusive	C1.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies	Membership policies free from discrimination across age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnic background	No discrimination policy is adhered to.
C1.3 Employ fairly, safely and provide career opportunities	C1.3.1 Ethical and legal employment, working conditions and professional development	Adopt an equal opportunity recruitment and hiring policy; Follow all relevant legislation and best practice for hiring and employment; Follow all relevant legislation and best practice for worker safety	Working conditions are adequate. New and seasonal employees are inducted by senior staff. Induction to a specific task is documented, and the inductee confirms training with her/his signature. The club supports professional development, both for greenkeeping and office staff.
<u>C2 Outreach & Inclusion</u>			
C2.1 Diversify access and provide multifunctionality	C2.1.1 Social and recreational activities at the facility	No specific international requirement, however, identify multifunctional activities and look for continual improvements	Clubhouse café is open to all. Local residents use the golf course for skiing and walking outside the golfing season. The club hosts workplace recreation days to interested companies and organizations.
C2.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	C2.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes	No specific international requirement, however, identify activities to support volunteering and charity and look for continual improvements	Ähtärin Golf hosts a charity competition organised by Naisten Pankki (Women's Bank), raising funds to support women's entrepreneurship in developing countries. Volunteering is on an exceptionally high level, e.g. the club management and many golfing activities are run by volunteers.
C2.3 Establish active community partnerships	C2.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with neighbours, the local community and other groups	No specific international requirement, however, identify partnerships and community activities and look for continual improvements	School pupils can visit the club and try golf as part of their physical education classes. Golf competitions are organised for partner companies and organizations.
C3 Communications & Advocacy			

C3.1 Engage staff and golfers	C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness and understanding amongst members and visitors	Involve staff and committees in sustainability efforts; Involve golfers in sustainability efforts; Post sustainability information in the clubhouse and / or on the golf course	Course manager is leading the sustainability work, supported by club chairperson (community activities) and a board member (forest management, wildlife support). CCIP: Please increase sustainability communication to members and other stakeholders using suitable channels.
C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community	Share at least 3 Highlights on sustainable.golf	Three highlights have been submitted. Future highlights could include the strong culture of volunteerism at the club, and the utilisation of hybrid/electric/robotic technology in course management.
C3.3 Follow a journey of continuous improvement	C3.3.1 Measures to help track, review and improve sustainability and climate action	Put measures in place to ensure that OnCourse can be updated annually	Course manager is responsible for collecting and entering data, and other key staff supply information from their respective areas.

Golf and Sustainability

Among all sports, golf has a particularly close relationship with the environment and communities, golf facilities can bring many benefits to people and nature - from the protection of greenspace and conservation of biodiversity; healthy recreation for all ages; local supply chains; and jobs, tourism and other forms of economic value.

Adopting a more sustainable approach is also good for golf. It's about presenting a high-quality golf course and providing a memorable experience in natural surroundings. It's about being as efficient as possible. And it's about supporting the community in a range of ways that bring increased recognition, respect and contact.

At a broader level, it's important that golf credibly demonstrates its commitment, and its social and environmental value – strengthening the sport's image and reputation for the long term.

Golf facilities that participate in OnCourse®, an international sustainability initiative assured by the non-profit GEO Foundation, are taking a comprehensive approach and striving to be leaders in the community.

Find out more at www.sustainable.golf