GEO Certified®

GEO Certified® Report
Golf Les Iles

Prepared by Independent Verifier, Paolo Croce

Certified by GEO Foundation August 2019
Valid until August 2022

Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that Golf Les Iles 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 developed modern sustainability Standard of best practice.

Golf Les Iles 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 set for the future, Golf Les Iles should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, Golf Les Iles can therefore claim a position as a credible 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 and club house. This dedication and leadership 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

Richard Allison
Manager, GEO Certified Facilities

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 – that 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**

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

Habitats and Biodiversity

The activity and commitment to the environment have also been promoted through the creation of a birdwatching station, the organisation of events and the installation of panels on environments and species proving information and raising awareness amongst users.
Naturalists such as Andrea Battisti and Claretta Christille, with other colleagues appointed by the club, have conducted on-site fauna studies on Odonata (dragonflies), Lepidoptera (butterflies) and birds, to assess the naturalistic importance of the site, and to define conservation and management measures in line with the sport activity. All this shows management's interest in demonstrating that environmental recovery is truly underway, also considering the presence of rare species that stop over, nest, reproduce and feed in these environments that have come back to life, thus demonstrating Les Iles' role as a natural oasis.

In particular, two species related to rushes (namely the reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* and the marsh warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*) direct demonstrate that the reeds and the tifeti grown along the lake shores once more allow the nidification of these birds, showing environmental quality. Moreover, the nest boxes on club trees provide further data on species, especially the great tit *Parus major*, that use this artificial alternative. All this is line with the IUCN directive (International Union for Conservation of Nature) that recently drafted a document entitled “Sport and Biodiversity” containing guidelines to mitigate impacts of any sport facility on the territory and providing support to make sport an ally of nature. The club constantly updates the data of the fauna check list and has planted on the site – with good establishment results – some examples of the flora typical of the Val d’Aosta river environment to improve biodiversity.

One of the last objectives reached over the last three years thanks to the project is the presence of *Iris sibirica*. This action saw the participation of Rudy Sandi, who has always been passionate about Valle D’Aosta flora, in particular aquatic and swamp plants. *Iris sibirica* symbolizes the damp, marshy environment of the Aostan valley floor, that has almost disappeared due to the urbanisation started in the 1960s, quarry operations and current remediation activities disguised as fixing of irrigation channels and transformation of uncultivated land into farmed land. Recently, behind the golf course, one of the last channels with a reed bed was destroyed by bulldozers, thus eliminating another strip of riparian environment. "Operation pollinator" has also begun and special areas are left to spontaneous, herbaceous vegetation favouring the presence of pollinating insects.

Turfgrass

The site is small, approx. 8 ha in total. The area devoted to turfgrass measures 6.55 ha, of which 0.35 ha are for greens (*Agrostis stolonifera* and *Poa annua)*, 1.1 ha for tees (*Lolium perenne*, *Festuca rubra, Poa annua)*, 2.15 ha for fairways (*Agrostis stolonifera, Lolium perenne*, *Poa annua* plus weeds*)*, 1.6 ha for semirough and rough (*Agrostis stolonifera, Festuca arundinacea, Festuca rubra, Lolium perenne*, *Poa annua* plus weeds*),* and 1.35 ha for the driving range (*Festuca arundinacea, Festuca rubra, Lolium perenne*, *Poa annua* plus weeds*).* The irrigation surface is slightly smaller than the turfgrass surface and is 5.75 ha.

As regards nutrients, input on greens is well balanced (N and K in equal proportions and P about 1/3 of the other elements) The tees and fairways are fertilized exclusively with nitrogen fertilizers used in high doses on the tees and in low doses on the fairways. The club has for quite some time used natural organic cold-processed products that do not kill microorganisms useful for the biosphere and that currently account for 80% of nutrition at CG Les Iles. Overall, the input of elements is considerably lower than the average of the fields of the Po valley plain and significantly below agricultural production in the area.

The presence of numerous monocotyledonous and dicotyledonous weeds (tees and fairways) and the observation of old fungal diseases (e.g. *Sclerotinia homoecarpa* – Dollar spot) on greens reflect rigorous compliance with the National Action Plan (Piano di Azione Nazionale - PAN), which prohibits the use of pesticides on so-called “sensitive” areas, examples which include sports facilities and golf courses in Italy. Over the last two years, only two applications of organic insecticides (*Beauveria bassiana*) have been done on tees and four on greens. Wetting agents have never been used, whereas topdressing and aerification operations are correctly performed on tees and greens on a regular basis.

Pollution Prevention

Also in accordance with national legislation, no pesticide treatments are performed, except the application of organic insecticides. As regards nutrition, natural organic products (80%) are used almost exclusively. There are therefore no particular concerns about water bodies and artificial basins. In any case, no administration is done for a 3-4 metre strip along these water bodies. Staff have not yet received formal training on turfgrasses, but are willing and determined to acquire new knowledge. There is an expert gardener, who is present when necessary. The maintenance centre is small, but equipped with everything needed for the machinery and its maintenance.

A washing machine is present (currently temporary), as are external spaces and premises to store the materials. Potentially harmful materials (fuels, lubricants, batteries, filters and exhausted oils) are stored in warehouses and disposed of by external companies in accordance with current legislation. Clippings are not collected and are immediately returned to the turfgrass. The only exception is the green, where clippings are distributed on the semi rough manually.

RESOURCES

Water

Irrigation water is withdrawn by means of submerged pumps at the centre of the artificial reservoir, which is the result of the environmental recovery of the previous sand extraction quarry. The irrigation surface is 5.75 ha out of 6.55 ha of turfgrass, and 8 ha in total. The data refers to annual consumption (average of the last two years about 71,000 m^3) and may seem very high, but it should be noted that the reclamation work of the ex-quarry provided no agricultural land, but only production waste (gravel and sand) present on the site. This hyper-draining and leaching substrate, together with the strong wind from the valley floor tend to dry off the turfgrass and do not allow good water retention, so significant water volumes are needed to maintain the turf. It should also be recalled that most fields (grazing and crops) in the entire Valle d'Aosta are irrigated because they are used as a source of food for Valdostana cattle, whose milk is used to produce one of the most valued Italian cheeses: Fontina d'Aosta. Therefore, irrigation consumption in agriculture is much greater than the national average. The irrigation system is of the latest generation and regular inspections are done to reduce the risk of leaks. Quality monitoring is performed regularly: weekly visual inspections (on the withdrawal basin) and annual chemical inspections.
In 2018 consumption in the clubhouse decreased from 2,000 m^3 (in 2017) to 200 m^3 because a business branch was transferred to third parties. Consumption of the maintenance facilities has been constant over the years (app. 15 m^3).

Energy

As regards energy, Golf Les Iles has implemented the following actions aimed at reducing energy consumption, installing new plants and modifying existing ones, as well as supporting sound internal and external policies. As far as energy conservation is concerned, the club has installed a warm water heating system for the summer swimming pool with solar powered heating collectors ever since the second year of its opening to the public (2007). In this way, constant heating is produced that, depending on the climate conditions, varies from 21 to 28 degrees, granting a pleasant swim during the period open to the public (1st June - 15th September) at the sole cost of the energy required to circulate water inside the panels, refilling the compensation bathtub of the swimming pool filtration system with heated water. The panels also have an excellent yield when the sky is cloudy, because they absorb heat from the warm wind. Heating pool water is absolutely necessary in alpine climate conditions like Golf Les Iles location, because the constant f winds and high

frequency of cold nights even in summer disperse the heat absorbed by water during the sunny days, keeping the temperature below the temperature level required by the local health unit (ASL) for bathing.

The system is installed on the clubhouse roof and faces east, west and south-west. The investment costs were less than €10,000 (panels and circulation pump) and have saved at least €50,000 of natural gas (LPG) so far, compared to traditional systems. The maintenance cost of the system is moderate: in the past ten years, just one panel had to be replaced that was damaged by the New Year's Eve fireworks, and the circulation pump was replaced after the first six years of life.

The club has made some changes to the electrical system in the past three years. The main changes are listed below:

- Many internal lamps, including in the main entrance of the club house, have been replaced by LED lightbulbs.
- The power unit of certain equipment available to clients disposal is controlled by analogue timers, so it turns on only when the club is open to the public. In this way, the equipment is switched off during the closing hours and at night: some examples are the air compressors to clean shoes and carts and the coin changer on the driving range.
- The pumps of the old irrigation system are also controlled by an analogue timer that switches the system on exclusively during irrigation hours. The irrigation system on the old part of the golf course is not fitted with inverters and works with pressure switches, so it consumes more energy.
- The irrigation system on the new part of the golf course (finalised and approved by the Italian Golf Federation in 2012) was designed taking energy saving requirements into consideration. In particular, the system has been fitted with inverters. Inverters are professional devices that allow variations in the frequency of power supply for electrical motors. They help reduce electric consumption, hammering and wear in the pumping system.
- The club plans to replace the domestic hot water gas boiler for toilets and showers in the locker rooms of the golf and swimming pool with an air-water heat pump. In this way, no gas will be used to heat water: total elimination of the cost of gas versus moderate electrical consumption, when there are peaks of warm water use, for example during Sundays in July and August, when swimming pool use is high.
- An agreement has been signed with the local community through the "Consorteria di Villefranche", thanks to which the wood from pruning and tree felling on the golf course is taken and divided among families of the consortium to heat their homes and produce domestic hot water with wood-burning stoves and boilers.

As regards energy sources:

- since 2013, Repower Vendita Italia SPA has provided energy to Golf Les Iles. The club has decided to pay a few cents more per kWh compared to other cheaper contracts to have green energy coming from a certified source.
- The following documents are available:
  1) TÜV certificate
  2) Energy certificate of origin
  3) Certificate of energy sustainability index

The energy sustainability index is calculated based on the importance of specific activities carried out in favour of virtuous corporate energy sustainability behaviour.
Golf Les Iles' index is currently 3.4 out of 5, as shown on 06/03/2019 in a specific investigation.

Golf Les Iles is planning interventions on the electrical system, after which a new analysis of energy efficiency will be requested. Energy supplier has assigned an advisor who frequently visits the golf club, offering free advice, suggesting the best energy-saving solutions and suggesting initiatives in this regard.

As regards sustainable mobility:

- since 2016, Golf Les Iles has had an electrical bike through a free use contract signed with the electricity company. The bike is used by management and secretarial staff to move within the golf club in order to reduce the use of motor vehicles.
- Golf Les Iles supports the use of bikes by clients, offering club members a bicycle parking lot and a free charging station. For all other clients, the charging station is available for €1 per day. The initiative is backed by the bicycle lane connecting Aosta to Brissogne (location of the club) and to other municipalities of the Aosta valley floor.

Materials

The club supports the disposable product reduction policy. In the past few years, all shopping bags have been eliminated. Club waste and recyclable waste are collected the door-to-door system established by the municipality of Brissogne. Italy has reached a record recycling rate of 80% (1,800 kg of waste produced per year and 1,450 kg of recycled waste). To reduce the use of paper, all communications between members take place using e-mails or text messages.
Aeration plugs, leaves and verticutting waste are reused as compost on the golf course. There are separate containers for plastic, glass, paper and metal on the tees.

COMMUNITY

The club is not exclusive, but is open to local communities and holds numerous social and environmental initiatives. The club can be considered multi-purpose and is available to host meetings of associations and external groups. Its multi-purpose nature is related to the opportunity to practice other sports on the artificial reservoir like: canoeing, windsurfing, sailing, scuba diving, and soon, bathing. The club has an environmental page on its website, which is always kept up to date. Recently, the national TV network (RAI) dedicated a report on the club about golf and environment. The management holds events with local products as prizes and offers free e-bike charging at the club.
The following initiatives have been carried out for charity:

1) participation in Earth Day with a charity tournament (the club has held a golf tournament on Earth Day for many years; its theme in 2019 was the protection of biodiversity). This is the only event organized in the Valle d'Aosta region recognized by Earth Day Italy and was also mentioned on some national newspapers like ANSA (Italian press agency) and Radio Monte Carlo. This year, part of the tournament receipts (10%) will be donated directly to an environmental protection activity: (purchase of plants) with the aim of increasing biodiversity on the green area of the golf course and other areas
2) tournament in favour of the Valle d'Aosta association helping people suffering from Parkinson's disease
3) tournament in favour of a Valle d'Aosta association working with disabled youth
4) purchase of wooden benches from a cooperative hosting and employing political refugees
5) Nearest the Pin charity fundraising initiative (beneficiary still to be decided)

Conclusion

We, Paolo Croce and Marta Visentin, independent accredited verifiers, recommend Les Iles Golf Club to be awarded the GEO Certified ecolabel because of its important contribution to safeguarding and preserving the landscape and the surrounding environment.

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