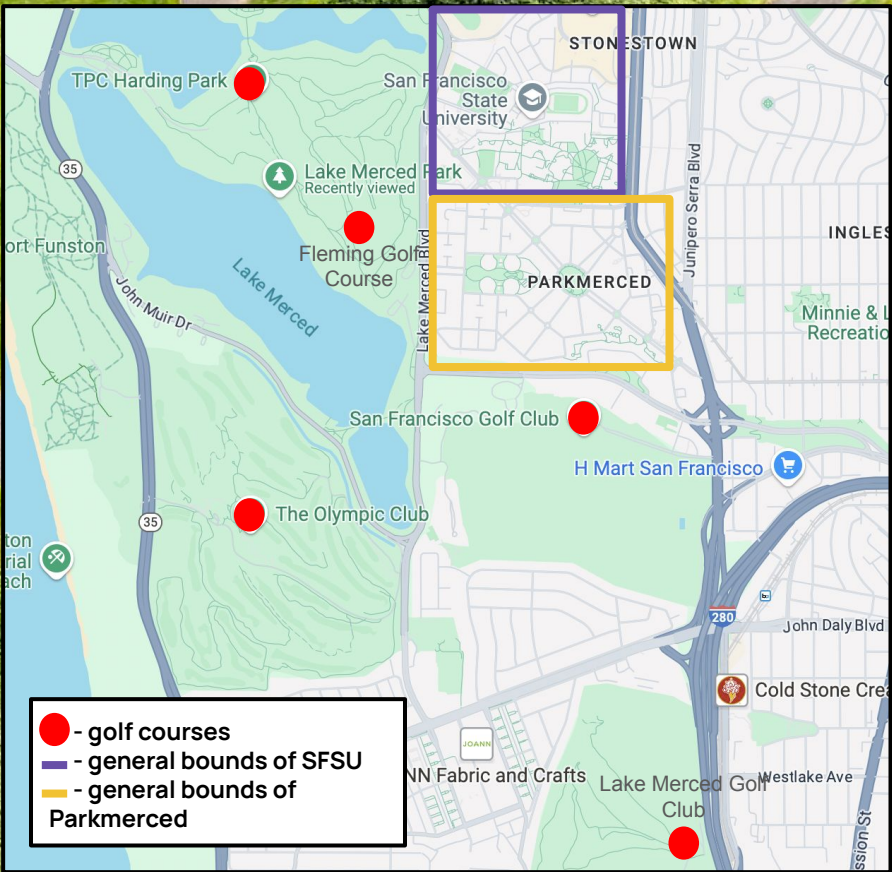


Exploring the Impacts of Golf Courses on the Lake Merced Community & Ecosystem

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Introduction

8.5 miles of land is allocated for golf around Lake Merced, while SF State's campus and housing takes up only 3. Take your guess on which institution better serves the community.

Within San Francisco there are:

- 10 golf courses.
- 809,000 residents, not including the undocumented and homeless populations.

Golf courses are taking up essential space, water, and livable land while harming native flora and fauna and excluding a vast majority of the population. For these reasons, golf courses need to be drastically altered in scope of environmental accountability and social welfare to negate their negative impacts on the local community.

Environmental Consequences

Local golf courses are negatively impacting the environment.

Lake Merced is slowly losing water due to excessive water-usage from golf courses in its direct vicinity (1).

- Golf courses put stress on local aquifers that supply Lake Merced and the local community (2).
- Lower water-levels cause spikes in freshwater algae levels, decreasing the overall water-quality of Lake Merced (1).

6,000 pounds of herbicide is used annually on city-managed golf courses (3).

- Herbicide pollutes groundwater and Lake Merced (4).
- Contaminated water harms native wildlife, endangered species, and local ecosystems (4).
- Golf courses managed with herbicide expose communities, wildlife, and golfers to harmful chemicals (4).

Community Impacts

Golf courses are elitist: requiring hefty membership fees, initiation costs, fees to play, and exclusive internal invitations. How can the amount of land taken up by golf courses be justified when they serve such a microscopic percent of the community?

3/5s of the golf courses around Lake Merced are private, including The San Francisco Golf Club, one of the most exclusive memberships in the entire U.S. (5). These 5 golf courses take up more than 4 times the land of SF state and its housing complexes.

SF State students struggle to find affordable housing:

- 10% of college students experience homelessness (6).
- 35% of college students experience housing insecurity (6).
- 8,323 people were reported homeless in SF in 2024 (7).



Coober Pedy golf course, Australia



Solutions

Golf courses should not be entirely removed from American way of life, but they need to be improved to better serve the American people and protect natural resources and wildlife:

Traditional grass fields can be replaced with eco-friendly variants that use less water.

- Australian golf course, Coober Pedy, has adapted to its desert climate by using quarry waste-materials to create an eco-friendly rocky turf (8).

Landscaping should be done by hand to reduce herbicide use.

- Turf grass does not absorb water well, provides no value to wildlife, and lawnmowers create greater carbon emissions than automobiles. (9)

Local golf courses need to be publicly accessible through affordable pricing and more accessible memberships.

- Golf culture outside the U.S. shows far lower membership pricing (10).

The number and size of local golf courses needs to be regulated to make space for affordable housing.

Conclusion

Golf courses consume excessive land and resources while serving few and harming the environment. Re-thinking them would help to address San Francisco's current housing crisis, increased homelessness, and water shortages.