GEO Certified® Report
Golf Club Villars

Prepared by independent verifier, Hector Forcen

Certified by GEO Foundation: June 2022
Valid until: June 2025

“Golf Club Villars is a beautiful course, seamlessly integrated into the Alpine landscape. Their dedicated course manager leads on sustainability within the club and supports many actions which contribute strongly to the local environment and community.

Numerous unique plant species can be found in the roughs and surroundings and the presence of deer, marmots, young foxes and hares is clear evidence that nature can thrive when golf manages the landscape properly.

Villars is a high-performing, interesting facility different from conventional golf clubs, which actively attracts and promotes golf in the region."

Hector Forcen

(GEO accredited independent verifier)

Introduction

GEO Foundation is pleased to confirm that **Golf Club Villars** 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.

Golf Club Villars 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, **Golf Club Villars** should be awarded GEO Certified® status.

For the certification period stated above, **Golf Club Villars** 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

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

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**	Map all habitats and vegetation types on the site; Regularly update landscape / biodiversity surveys	Golf de Villars was founded in 1922, located at an altitude of 1,660 m with beautiful alpine views including Mont Blanc.

				The club has 90 ha land where 18 holes are very well integrated in the surrounding alpine landscape. The golf course is dominated by tree areas and alpine wildflower meadows in the out of play areas, meltwater streams and biotopes which separate the golf holes and provide extensive habitat for birds, amphibians, mammals, and insects. Outside the fairways there is a good chance of finding different types of mushrooms. In the evening you can regularly see deer, marmots, young foxes, or hares around the golf course. CIP: The club should more formally identify / map the habitats on-site.
		N1.1.2 Knowledge of legal designations for protected areas, habitats and species	Understand legal responsibilities for protected landscapes and species; Record and monitor protected, endangered, or rare species found on the site	The club is seriously working on environmental issues and cooperates closely with local authorities and associations, including: https://www.alpesvivantes.ch/Notre-Biodiversite/ https://www.vogelwarte.ch/fr/home/ You can find different areas of the rough with orchids and other alpine flora, local species of high ecological value.
		N1.1.3 Understanding and respect for cultural heritage	Protect any archaeological, historical or cultural designations on the site	No archaeological, historical or cultural designation are present (or known) on the course.
	N1.2 Opportunities to naturalise the course	**N1.2.1 Measures taken to identify and minimise the required area of managed turfgrass**	Observe, track and / or monitor golfer play	Large rough areas on the course have been naturalised with carried grasslands and wildflower meadows. Cows graze in the roughs of the golf course.
	N1.3 Actively manage habitats for wildlife	**N1.3.1 Projects to manage habitats in the best way for wildlife and golf**	Regularly review and follow a habitat management plan; Prioritise native species when planting and landscaping	The course manager and team work in harmony with nature, with the aim of limiting human and chemical impact, and promoting biodiversity. The whole golf course is very well integrated in the natural mountains landscape. Some new trees are being planted on different rough areas following the recommendations of the local forestry authorities. Beehives have been installed near the tee on hole No. 2, with a good harvest of organic honey, a few jars of which will be on sale at the pro shop.

			Specific working days to remove invasive plants are organized in collaboration with local environmental associations.
N1.4 Conserve key species	**N1.4.1 Practical conservation measures for priority species**		Roughs and meadows are not fertilized to maintain the natural flora. Overgrown and low edges / banks in ponds are kept protecting species that lives in small waters. An insect hotel (5 stars with a breath-taking view of Mont Blanc!), has been installed very close to a biotope between the green on hole 11 and the tee on hole 12.
N2 Turfgrass			
N2.1 Maintain optimum turf and soil health	**N2.1.1 Appropriate turfgrass varieties adapted to climatic and other geomorphological factors**	Select appropriate grass species for climate	The course manager has extensive experience and perfectly knows the specific conditions of the course. He keeps searching and testing the most suitable turf varieties. Greens are being converted during the last nine years from Poa annua to fine fescue / Agrostis and Poa mix.
	N2.1.2 Practices to maintain good soil structure and condition		The club has made the decision to reduce the number of chemicals and increase mechanical maintenance operations. Greens are aerated 2 times a year using deep solid tines. Blades aeration is carried out as much as needs being a method to keep good soil structure. Topdressing programme on greens is implemented with excellent results. They have been carried out on greens before, but since the new low-input maintenance philosophy has been implemented, they are not necessary as in the old days. Fertiliser is kept to a bare minimum.
	N2.1.3 Careful and responsible fertiliser application throughout the year to avoid over-fertilisation	Undertake soil tests and nutrient analysis	In terms of fertilization the applications are made mainly of liquids with trace elements using algae and microorganisms regularly as well as organic inputs. The amounts in recent years have been drastically reduced.
N2.2 Prioritise mechanical maintenance	**N2.2.1 Non-chemical pest, disease and weed management**	Sharpen mowing blades; Remove surface moisture; Hand weeding	Mowers cylinders and knives are sharpened at the end of the season. Machines are washed every time after they have been used. Dew moisture and leaves are removed to keep the turf as dry as possible. Standard good practises (daily inspections, local weeding etc) are used to reduce herbicide use as much as possible. It is important to mention its manual weeding program implemented for years in which all team members participate, being supported by club members at different times of the year.

N2.3 Use chemicals responsibly	**N2.3.1 Application of chemicals only when necessary to prevent or cure defined / identified turf health issues**	Establish patterns and levels of risk for pests and diseases; Scout the course daily for early signs of pests and disease; Accurate pest and disease identification; Map and track pest and disease hotspots; Establish pest and disease thresholds	Diseases are closely monitored, and when problems are noticed, local corrective actions are taken. The use of pesticides is kept to a minimum and efforts for prevention are prioritized (zero fungal treatments). The use of different turf varieties on the greens together with the grass conversion has reduced the number of fungicidal treatments for winter diseases. It is important to emphasize the careful minimal nutritional program that reduces amounts helping to control diseases. The club has established tolerance thresholds for diseases and pests, and it is the club staff and committee who defends them and transmits them to the players.
	N2.3.2 Application of chemicals with full safety precautions	Use only legally registered and approved products; Ensure staff are fully qualified and licenced to use pesticides; Regularly calibrate and test applicators; Use appropriate protective equipment; Dilute and dispose of leftover product on untreated areas of turf	Only legislated chemicals are used. The use of phytosanitary products has been reduced to a minimum. The applications are made by the head greenkeeper. Ecological conditions and weather are considered before the application is carried out. Zero fungicides used (and only 1 herbicide application in 2021). (The presence of broadleaf weeds in fairways confirms the fact that a zero pesticide policy is implemented).
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; Maintain mowing buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas; Maintain spraying and spreading buffer zones around water and all ecologically sensitive areas; Create a map / aerial visual reproduction, drawing etc of the course showing buffer zones and no-spray, no-spread areas.	The club is respecting the security perimeters established by Swiss law in humid and natural areas. The plan or map of untreated areas would be practically all the 90 hectares, only 1 product was applied in 2021 on 0.8 ha. The club have an emergency spill responses plan for the maintenance area.
	N3.1.2 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from clubhouse operations	Ensure all hazardous materials are safely and securely stored; Ensure compliance with all required standards and systems for hazardous waste and wastewater discharge	Contracts for disposal of hazardous waste from the facility are established with external local companies that are specialists in waste management. Recycled products and waste are stored in a shed near the train station, this is how they are transported to the town, being a magnificent example of efficiency and a nice example where public transport is used to transport waste.

		N3.1.3 Practical measures to ensure pollution risks are minimised from maintenance facility operations	Ensure wash areas are on impermeable, leak-free surfaces; Mixing and loading of pesticides and fertilisers over an impermeable surface; Triple rinse pesticide containers and applicators	In the workshop all drums with oils for machinery maintenance have their corresponding anti-spill containment system. Wash area for machines on the maintenance facility is impermeable, leak-free surface and is provided with filtration system.
	N3.2 Safely manage hazardous substances	**N3.2.1 Legal compliance in the storage, handling, application and safe disposal of all hazardous substances**	Maintain a register of hazardous materials available to authorised staff; Safe storage in secure and ventilated concrete or metal building; Sufficient storage capacity; Impermeable flooring; Spill containment kits present; Emergency wash area; Fire extinguisher in the immediate area; Secondary containment for fuel, either externally constructed, or integrally manufactured; Regular inspection of storage tanks	All fuel tanks are installed according to legislation and have approved inspections and controls. Records of products and treatments are maintained in a suitable room for the storage of phytosanitary products. Hazardous waste is provided to a licensed contractor. Fire extinguishers are placed in locations with fire risks. They are inspected annually by a certified company.
	N3.3 Responsibly manage waste / storm water	**N3.3.1 Appropriate wastewater usage and discharge licences**	Wastewater discharge licence; Appropriate treatment of machinery wash water (impermeable surface, oil / grease / clipping separation)	Wash bay with impermeable surface and hydrocarbon filters.

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**	Target irrigation to essential playing surfaces only	Only irrigates when is necessary based on the course manager's experience in combination with forecast data. Irrigation is on greens only and with a hose, being a great example of water efficiency.

	R1.2 Maximise water efficiency	**R1.2.1 Practical measures to use water more efficiently on the golf course**	Conduct regular irrigation performance checks; Provide staff training on efficient irrigation practices; Ensure effective application of water to target areas; Ensure irrigation schedules are informed by weather patterns and soil moisture analysis	Efficiency has been achieved thanks to hose pipe irrigation system. CIP: The club should consider acquiring a moisture sensor meter.
		R1.2.2 Practical measures to use water more efficiently in buildings	Audit water use regularly; Review bills frequently and look for irregularities; Encourage water-saving practices amongst staff and visitors; Categorise and track water consumption	The clubhouse is well equipped. Equipment of the latest technology and quality have been installed. Water saving activities are in place. Low-flush toilets and taps have been installed.
	R1.3 Source water responsibly	**R1.3.1 Measures towards alternative, lower quality sources of water**	Ensure appropriate water abstraction permit and reporting, as required	The club has legal access to extract water from the mountain lakes uphill. The water consumption is read and reported to the municipality.
	R2 Energy			
	R2.1 Reduce energy demand	**R2.1.1 Measures to reduce the amount of energy consumed in course maintenance**	Minimise areas of managed turf to reduce mowing, irrigation, and turf inputs	The naturalized areas of the club have been increased. The maintained rough has been diminished. Adjusted fertilization program is allowing to reduce the mowing frequency in fairways and tees with the consequent energy saving. There is the right to pasture the rough areas and links to the golf course by local farmers, assuming a great saving in the use of rough machinery for the club.
	R2.2 Maximise energy efficiency	**R2.2.1 Measures to use energy and fuels more efficiently in buildings**	Audit energy use regularly; Regularly review bills; Categorise and track energy consumption	Clearly the club is fully aware of its “energy-use” responsibilities, has installed a number of energy saving measures including low energy lighting and motion sensors, is switching from more traditional energy consuming lighting to LED and in coming years the club hopes to be fully equipped with LEDs.
	R2.3 Source energy responsibly	**R2.3.1 Measures to source alternative, renewable forms of energy**	Determine potential sources of renewable energy in the area and on-site, through renewable energy providers	The energy is supplied by the local distributor, being practically all of hydro source due to the situation of the golf course.

R3 Materials			
R3.1 Reduce materials demand	**R3.1.1 Products and materials selection based on necessity, including opportunities for recycled, reused and locally sourced alternatives**	Undertake a review of materials consumed	The club works with a local waste management company for recycling. All waste is stored according to legislation. They pile up the remains of pruning in the natural areas of the rough to serve as a refuge for animals and insects.
R3.2 Purchase responsibly	**R3.2.1 Practical use of an ethical / environmental purchasing policy**	Adopt a sustainable, or ethical / environmental purchasing policy to maximise the use of locally sourced goods and goods made from recycled, recyclable and certified materials	Local distributors are used, and some furniture of the golf course has been built by local companies and the maintenance team itself. It is important to highlight that the course manager has selected sand for his bunkers from a local quarry that uses respectful and sustainable methods. As with most restaurants nowadays, local products are preferred. The meat, milk and cheese served in the restaurant are from the cows that eat the rough and fields near the golf course. Locally produced beers and non-alcoholic beverages are served in the restaurant to golfers and other mountain athletes who frequent the restaurant and its terrace.
R3.3 Reuse and recycle	**R3.3.1 Waste stream separation for maximum recycling and re-use opportunity**	Demonstrate waste separation, reuse and recycling; Track how much waste goes to landfill, or is reused / recycled	The club keeps internal record/bills/invoices of annual quantities and all fractions produced. The waste is derived from hazardous and household waste. Almost all waste is recycled or reused, including PET, aluminium, metals, glass, paper, and cardboard. Materials from the kitchen and maintenance area such as detergents, oils, lubricants, pesticides, and batteries are collected and disposed by specialized company.
R3.4 Demonstrate legal compliance	**R3.4.1 Compliance with all local and regional waste management regulations**	Use authorised waste and recycling contractor for general, hazardous, industrial and green waste	Authorized waste and recycling contractors are used for both housekeeping waste, industrial and hazardous waste. Waste is collected by the municipal contractor and the specialized recycling company. Regarding the golf course and its maintenance, all regulations are complied with. (Restaurant its managed by an external company). CIP: Look for opportunities with the restaurant management to establish mutual purchasing / waste activities, and then communicate to patrons.

COMMUNITY

C1 Outreach

Objectives	Requirements	Mandatory Practices	Verifier Notes
C1.1 Diversify access and provide multi-functionality	**C1.1.1 Social and recreational activities at the facility**		Golf Villars is an open club to new players who wish to start and practice the sport of golf. The club organizes golf initiations bringing many young people from local schools to the course. The club has agreements and discounts with the hotels in the area and the golf activity is promoted. The restaurant is fully open to visitors who can use the facilities as well as organize events. Within the facility there are several public paths that are used by the citizens and visitors for walking or trekking. During the snow season skiing and winter golf are practiced on the course.
C1.2 Provide for volunteering and charity	**C1.2.1 Opportunities available for volunteering and support of charities and good causes**		Every beginning of the season at the end of winter, a volunteer day is organized where members and visitors collaborate in preparing the facilities for the opening. In collaboration with local environmental associations, they organize days with war refugees to remove invasive plants on the golf course.
C1.3 Establish active community partnerships	**C1.3.1 Positive and constructive engagement with neighbours, the local community and other groups**	Create a 'sustainability working group'	The club has a very good relationship with the neighbours and local authorities as well as different associations and organizations of nature. It is easy to find bird watchers walking the roughs and other members of nature protection institutions walking around the countryside. Each season different open days are held where they show the sport of golf to residents and tourists in the area. CIP: The club should look to more formally meet, discuss and plan sustainability work.

C2 Golfers & Employees			
C2.1 Improve health and wellbeing	**C2.1.1 Benefits to human physical and mental health from golf and facility activities**		The club takes care of its employees and makes available uniforms and all the necessary safety equipment for the correct and safe performance of daily tasks. Staff have golfing privileges. Defibrillators are installed at the clubhouse.
C2.2 Be open and inclusive	**C2.2.1 Inclusivity and diversity in membership and visitor policies**	Demonstrate inclusive policies for members and visitors	Golf de Villars is a golf course open and welcoming to members and visitors, as well as restaurant and events users. Seniors, ladies, and juniors enjoy the facilities weekly. The club collaborates with the local tourist office, and they provide initiation days in the driving range to clients and visitors of the hotels and apartments in the station. The restaurant is open to the public and many players and visitors use it to eat daily.
C2.3 Employ fairly and safely, and provide career opportunities	**C2.3.1 Ethical and legal employment, working conditions and professional development**	Follow all relevant national legislation and best practice for employment, health & safety etc	Greenkeeping staff receive regular education on pesticide handling, habitat management, safety, and waste administration. Working clothes, employee locker rooms, lunchroom, personal protection equipment, and first aid are available.
C3 Communications			
C3.1 Engage golfers and members	**C3.1.1 Communications activities that raise awareness and understanding amongst members and visitors**	Provide information on the facility's sustainability commitments, actions, or achievements	The club truly promotes awareness within the employee community with respect to energy and safety aspects. The club communicates its environmental activities to the members using the web-site, social media, newsletter, and internal notice boards.
C3.2 Celebrate and promote sustainability	**C3.2.1 Activities that raise awareness and engage people in the wider community**	Provide evidence of external communications and community engagement	Golf de Villars is a club of members who are properly informed of all activities and actions carried out in the club. The course manager actively participates in conferences and educational seminars.

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