

CONSERVATION COVER

(Acres)
Code 327

Natural Resources Conservation Service
Conservation Practice Standard

I. Definition

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover on the land.

II. Purpose

This practice may be applied to accomplish one or more of the following.

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Improve air quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.
- Improve soil quality.
- Manage plant pests.
- Promote habitat for native pollinators.

III. Conditions Where Practice Applies

This practice applies on all lands needing permanent vegetative cover. This practice does not apply to plantings for critical area protection or forage production.

IV. Federal, Tribal, State, and Local Laws

Users of this standard should be aware of potentially applicable federal, tribal, state and local laws, rules, regulations or permit requirements governing conservation cover. This standard does not contain the text of federal, tribal, state, or local laws.

V. General Criteria

A. General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

1. Species shall be adapted to soil, climatic, and ecological site conditions.
2. Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions.
3. Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose.
Certified Pure Live Seed shall be used.

Legumes shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobium bacteria.

4. Follow recommended seed mixtures planting dates, planting methods, fertilization, and the seed or planting stock handling guidelines outlined in Wisconsin Agronomy Technical Note 5, Prairie Restoration Seeding; or Technical Note 6, Cool Season Native and Introduced Species Seeding Recommendations.
5. Prior to planting into cropland fields, verify that herbicides previously applied to the site will not “carry over” and damage the new seeding.
6. Site preparation shall be adequate to assure weed suppression and to promote germination and growth of the species planted.
7. Establish a temporary cover crop as needed to control soil erosion and/or weeds when the seeding cannot be immediately established.
8. Planting equipment type, use, and timing shall be appropriate for the site conditions, soil characteristics, and type of seeds (size, etc.) selected to assure uniform placement and germination.
9. All nutrients will be applied following nutrient management requirements outlined in the Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), Section IV, Practice Standard 590, Nutrient Management.
10. The timing and method of prescribed burning where utilized shall be planned to enhance the growth and vigor of target species and to comply with the requirements of Wisconsin FOTG Section IV, Practice Standard 338, Prescribed Burning.

11. Weed suppression techniques shall be implemented during the establishment period and as needed thereafter to reduce weed competition.

- a. Herbicide applications shall comply with label instructions and requirements.
- b. Cover crops included in the seed mixture must be compatible with the seeding being established and capable of suppressing weeds.
- c. Timing of mowing shall be planned to prevent viable weed seed formation and/or spread.
- d. Type of mowing equipment will be selected based on physical site and cover conditions. Mow uniformly to distribute clipped material over the field surface so that established cover is not smothered.

B. Additional Criteria to Reduce Soil Erosion and Sedimentation

1. The potential for soil erosion (sheet and rill or wind) during establishment or cover enhancement activities shall be assessed using the current water or wind erosion prediction technology.
2. The appropriate sheet and rill erosion control practices necessary to achieve planned soil loss objectives shall be included in the planting plan (i.e., Contour Farming, No Till Planting, Cover Crop).
3. Additional conservation practices, such as Grassed Waterways and Grade Stabilization Structures, shall be planned as needed to complete the erosion control system for the site.

C. Additional Criteria for Improving Air Quality

1. To control dust in perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries, and nursery stock, vegetation established using this standard shall provide full ground coverage in the alleyway and headlands.
2. Carbon sequestration plantings established utilizing this standard shall result in a positive CO₂ equivalent value as determined

by utilizing the current approved carbon prediction technology.

D. Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

1. Grasses, forbs, shrubs, and/or legumes shall be planted in a diverse mix to promote biodiversity and meet the needs of the targeted species of wildlife.
2. Physical disturbances during the established nesting season or other identified use period by wildlife species in the conservation plan shall be limited to the extent practicable.
3. The long-term objectives of the land user and the needs of target wildlife species shall be considered in the planning of the vegetative cover.

E. Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality

Soil Conditioning Index calculated for the site shall achieve a positive value. Plantings will be established and maintained to produce high volumes of organic materials.

F. Additional Criteria to Manage Plant Pests

In perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries, and nursery stock, permanent vegetative cover shall be established and managed to enhance integrated pest management (IPM) strategies in effect for control of target pest species.

G. Additional Criteria for Promoting Pollination

1. Forbs and legumes will be selected to assure flowering throughout the entire growing season.
2. The seed mix shall include plants that bloom early in the growing season when pollinator food sources limit populations.
3. Select plants that provide the most pollen for pollinator species targeted by the management plan. See Wisconsin Biology Technical Note 8, Pollinator Biology and Habitat.

VI. Considerations

Additional recommendations relating to design that may enhance the use of, or avoid problems with, this

practice but are not required to ensure its basic conservation functions are as follows.

- A. This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species. Where wildlife is an objective, the food and cover value of the planting shall be planned to reflect the habitat needs of the target species.
- B. On sites where annual or cool season perennial grasses are an expected weed problem, it may be necessary to postpone or eliminate nitrogen fertilizer application until the planted species are well established.
- C. Where applicable, this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites.
- D. Consider rotating management and maintenance activities (e.g., mow only a portion each year) throughout the managed area to maximize diversity.
- E. Consider establishing a native plant community that is adapted to the site conditions and which meets landowner objectives. Use native species when appropriate for the identified resource concern and management objective.
- F. If native cover establishes through natural succession in an existing plant community, a certified conservation planner may evaluate the cover to determine if the cover:
 - contains grass and legume/forb diversity equal or greater than NRCS recommended seed mixtures,
 - meets the intended purpose and adequately addresses all identified resource concerns,
 - meets the decision maker's objective,
 - meets the rules and/or requirements of the program(s) in effect on the site,
 - plants classified as weeds or invasive species by Wisconsin Job Sheet 397, Maintenance on Established CRP, and/or applicable state law are being adequately contained.

Existing cover that is determined to meet all of these criteria can be considered to meet the requirements of this standard.

- G. In perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, and berries, flowering forbs and

legumes may be included in the seed mixture to attract and hold natural pollinator insects.

- H. If unique cover exists such as a rare remnant prairie, use of local genotype may be utilized with permission from the NRCS State Agronomist and guidance followed from Wisconsin Agronomy Technical Note 5.

VII. Plans and Specifications

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. They shall include, but are not limited to:

- recommended species to plant,
- seeding rates and dates,
- defined establishment procedures, and
- other management activities needed to insure establishment of an adequate stand.

Specifications shall be recorded using current Wisconsin job sheets for cool or warm season native or introduced grasses.

VIII. Operation and Maintenance

If wildlife habitat enhancement is a purpose, maintenance practice and activities shall not disturb cover during the nesting period for desired species. Exceptions shall be made to spot treat necessary weed invasions prior to them setting seed.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spray or other means to control noxious weeds shall be done on a "spot basis" to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

IX. References

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), Section III, Conservation Management Systems.

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), Section IV, Practice Standards and Specifications.

University of Wisconsin Extension Publication A1525, Perennial Forage Crop Variety Update for Wisconsin.

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Agronomy Technical Note 5, Prairie Restoration Seeding.

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USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Agronomy Technical Note 6, Cool Season Native and Introduced Species Seeding Recommendations.

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Biology Technical Note 8, Pollinator Biology and Habitat.

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Job Sheet 134, How To Establish and Maintain introduced Grasses and Legumes.

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Job Sheet 135, How to Establish and Maintain Native Grasses, Forbs, and Legumes.

USDA, NRCS Wisconsin Job Sheet 397, Maintenance on Established CRP.

University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension,
Invasive Plant Management in CRP Fields:
<http://ipcm.wisc.edu/Publications/tabid/54/Default.aspx>.