

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD
CONSERVATION COVER

(Ac.)

CODE 327

DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover.

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 and pollinator habitat;
- Improve soil quality;
- Manage plant pests.

CONDITION WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

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

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Species shall be adapted to soil, ecological sites, and climatic conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner's objectives, the cover should be considered adequate. For established stands, if the purpose(s) are/were something other than solely control of soil erosion, a stand of only smooth bromegrass,

Kentucky bluegrass, or other invasive cool-season species (or a combination of these species) would not be considered adequate. Stand enhancement would be needed to increase the diversity of the stand. Refer to Range Technical Note No. 4 for guidance on enhancing existing stands with methods such as interseeding.

Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose. Certified seed shall be used.

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling and planting of the seed, or planting stock shall ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival. Vegetative planting material (e.g., sprigs, rhizomes, bulbs) shall be from a reliable supplier.

Site preparation shall be sufficiently adequate to eliminate weeds for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

For guidance on seeding rates and methods, planting dates, site preparation, etc., refer to Range Technical Note No. 4.

All nutrients shall be applied following the nutrient management requirements in the South Dakota Technical Guide (SDTG).

Additional Criteria to Reduce Soil Erosion and Sedimentation

The amount of plant biomass and cover needed to reduce wind and water erosion to the planned soil loss objective shall be determined using the current approved wind and/or water erosion prediction technology.

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service [State Office](#), or visit the [electronic Field Office Technical Guide](#).

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Additional Criteria for Improving Air Quality

In perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries, and nursery stock, vegetation established shall provide full ground coverage in the alleyway during mowing and harvest operations.

To sequester carbon, plant cover established will result in a positive CO₂ equivalent value when determined by the current approved carbon prediction technology.

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat and Pollinator Habitat

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. Refer to Biology Technical Note No. 15 for guidance on species suitability for selected habitat needs.

Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality

Plants will be selected on the basis of producing high volumes of organic material to maintain or improve soil organic matter. The amount of biomass needed will be determined using the current soil condition index procedure.

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 according to Land Grant University Integrated Pest Management (IPM) recommendations for the target pest species.

CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.

Certified seed and planting stock that is adapted to the site should be used when it is available.

Inoculating legume seed with the proper *Rhizobium* bacteria should be considered on sites where the legumes to be planted have not been previously grown.

Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from broadleaf annual weeds.

On sites where annual grasses are an expected weed problem it may be necessary to postpone nitrogen fertilizer application until the planted species are well established.

Where applicable this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites.

Consider rotating management and maintenance activities (e.g., mow only one-fourth or one-third of the area each year) throughout the managed area to maximize spatial and temporal diversity.

Where wildlife management is an objective, the food and cover value of the planting can be enhanced by using a habitat evaluation procedure to aid in selecting plant species and providing or managing for other habitat requirements necessary to achieve the objective.

Use native species that are appropriate for the identified resource concern and management objective. Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

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

- recommended species;
- seeding rates and dates;
- establishment procedures;
- other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand.

Specifications shall be recorded using approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation. Refer to Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) Conservation Cover (327) Documentation Requirements for specific documentation that is required.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Management of established stands is required to maintain plant diversity, enhance wildlife benefits (maintenance activities that benefit wildlife can also be reported under the CPS Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645), and protect soil and water resources. All management activities, with the exception of prescribed burning, must be conducted outside the primary nesting season that is defined as May 1 through August 1. Prescribed burning may be conducted until May 15 if required to ensure a timely and successful burn. Management practices may be completed over a two-year period.

The following management activities are allowed:

- Light Disking – No more than 30 percent of the soil should be exposed. Till no deeper than three inches. Do not use on fields with a high risk of weed infestation or those being impacted by drought. Complete this activity between August 1 and September 1.
- Harrowing – No more than 30 percent of the soil surface should be exposed. Complete this activity between August 1 and September 1.
- Prescribed Burning – This practice can only be done under an approved burn plan prepared by a qualified person. See the CPS Prescribed Burning (338) for additional details. Complete this activity between March 1 and May 15.

- Clipping or Mowing – Mow to a normal hay cutting height. Any removal of residues must be in compliance with regulatory requirements. Complete this activity between August 1 and September 1.

No management activities will be conducted later than September 1 or earlier than March 1 in order to allow for re-growth before the end of the growing season and to provide adequate winter cover.

Mowing and harvest operations in perennial crop systems such as orchards, vineyards, berries, and nursery stock shall be done in a manner which minimizes the generation of particulate matter.

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

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

REFERENCES

Renard, K.G., G.R. Foster, G.A. Weesies, D.K. McCool and D.C. Yoder. 1997. Predicting Soil Erosion by Water: A Guide to Conservation Planning with the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE), Agricultural Handbook Number 703.

Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation Version 2 (RUSLE2) website (checked September 2010):

http://fargo.nserl.purdue.edu/rusle2_dataweb/