

**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.
- 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.

**CRITERA**

**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.

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.

All nutrients shall be applied following the nutrient management requirements in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

**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.

**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 CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent value when determined by the current approved carbon prediction technology.

**Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife 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.

**Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality**

Plants will be selected on the basis of producing high volumes of organic material to

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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.

### **Additional Criteria Applicable to Temporary Grass or Grain Cover**

Temporary cover during the first year of establishment is allowed if:

1. Required seeds or plant stocks are not available.
2. The normal planting period for the species has passed.
3. Where chemical residue does not allow for establishment of intended planting.
4. Permanent cover will be established the following year.

Refer to *Specification Guide Sheet for Critical Area Planting (342), FOTG Section IV.*

### **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.

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Where applicable this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites. [Other conservation practices like grassed waterways may be needed to complete the erosion control plan.](#)

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. [Avoid using Crown Vetch and/or Reed Canary grass in any of the mixes.](#) If the area is near a grazing system avoid tall fescues in the mix unless it is guaranteed endophyte free seed. It is suspected that this endophyte infected cultivar has been deleterious to wildlife as well, so use caution with "conservation mixes". Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site as the priority planting option.

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.

### **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.

The specifications shall include:

- Location
- Field Number
- Acreage
- Any maintenance requirements applicable
- Soil test results and fertilizer recommendations

#### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

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.

If wildlife habitat enhancement is a purpose, maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the reproductive period for the desired species. Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species. Control class A and B weeds under Vermont Department of Agriculture Food and Markets quarantine rules on noxious weeds.

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**

K. G. Renard, G. R. Foster, G. A. Weesies, K. 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 May 2007): [http://fargo.nserl.purdue.edu/rusle2\\_dataweb/RUSLE2\\_Index.htm](http://fargo.nserl.purdue.edu/rusle2_dataweb/RUSLE2_Index.htm)