

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

CONSERVATION COVER

(Ac.)
CODE 327



DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover.

PURPOSES

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.

CONDITIONS WHERE THIS 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

Use either native or introduced species adapted to soil, range site, and climate conditions and that are suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Do not plant any species found on the Florida Dep. of Agriculture and Consumer Services or the Florida Dep. of Environmental Protection noxious or prohibited weed lists. Additionally, do not plant any species listed as a Category 1 invasive plant species as defined by the Florida Exotic Plant Council (<http://www.fleppc.org/list/list.htm>) or See FOTG Section I [F][4][b].

Seeding rates and methods used need to be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose. References include but are not limited to Florida Technical Notes, Plant Materials Section; National Biology Manual; Range Management for Important Native Grasses of Florida; Florida Native Seed Production Manual; and UF/IFAS Florida Forage Handbook.

Select planting dates, planting methods and care in handling of the seed or planting stock that

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](#).

ensures planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival. Obtain vegetative planting material (e.g., sprigs, rhizomes, bulbs) from a reliable supplier.

Use only viable, high quality, and adapted seed or planting stock.

Inoculate legume seed with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.

Plant trees and shrubs according to Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, Tree/Shrub Establishment, (Code 612) and guidance.

Site preparation needs to be sufficient to eliminate weeds for establishment and growth of selected species.

Use appropriate timing and use of equipment for the site and soil conditions.

Use prescribed burning or mechanical, biological or chemical methods, or a combination of the four to manipulate vegetation to maximize plant and animal diversity. All burning will be in conformance with Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, Prescribed Burning, (Code 338).

When mixtures of grasses, forbs, and legumes are to be planted together use planting methods and rates that will ensure survival of forbs and legumes.

Do not use any fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals that will compromise the intended purpose. Application of nutrients and pest control will be in conformance with Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standards, Nutrient Management, (Code 590), and Pest Management, (Code 595).

Hold erosion rates at or below soil loss tolerance.

Impact to cultural resources, wetlands, and Federal and State protected species needs to be determined prior to implementation of this practice. Any impacts need to be avoided or minimized to the extent practical during planning, design and implementation of this conservation practice in accordance with established National and Florida NRCS policy, General Manual (GM) Title 420-Part 401, Title 450-Part 401, and Title 190-Parts 410.22

and 410.26; National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) FL Supplements to Parts 600.1 and 600.6; National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook (NCRPH); and The National Environmental Compliance Handbook (NECH).

Additional Criteria to Reduce Soil Erosion and Sedimentation

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

Additional Criteria To Improve Water Quality

Install appropriate conservation practices where erosion is occurring; adjacent to water bodies, wetlands, sinks, and/or other sensitive areas; and/or other areas where water quality may be impaired. These Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standards include but are not limited to Riparian Forest Buffer, (Code 392); Critical Area Planting, (Code 342); Filter Strip, (Code 393); and Field Border, (Code 386).

The width of all buffers must be adequate to protect the area of concern from wind and water borne sediments.

Additional Criteria for Improving Air Quality

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

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

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

Plant a diverse mixture of grasses, forbs, shrubs and/or legumes to promote biodiversity and meet the needs of the targeted species of wildlife.

Base selection and planting rates on values to the wildlife under consideration. See "Management for

wildlife; a supplement to wildlife standards and specifications for Florida” (NRCS, 1979), as well as, Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standard, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, (Code 645), and its guidance for recommended plants for wildlife.

Management practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the primary nesting period (i.e., March 1 to July 15); exceptions are provided under the Operation and Maintenance section of this standard. Strip maintenance practices of the area are acceptable based on the operation and maintenance plan.

To benefit native pollinators and insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, perform spraying or other control measures of weedy species on a “spot treatment” basis to protect forbs and legumes.

See Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standards, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, (Code 645), and Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, (Code 644), for further guidance on wildlife habitat.

Additional Criteria to Improve Soil Quality

Base selection of plants used in this practice on their ability to produce high volumes of organic material to maintain or improve soil organic matter. Determine the amount of biomass needed 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, establish and manage permanent vegetative cover according to UF/IFAS 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.

The use of native plant species (grasses, forbs and legumes) should be encouraged for all cover situations.

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

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.

In riparian areas, consider the use of native plants for conservation cover in the restoration of these ecosystems.

If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner’s objectives, the cover can be considered adequate.

Where the site is erosive and has concentrated runoff, combinations of erosion control practices need to be included to provide the most desirable effects.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Prepare specifications for this practice on each site. As a minimum the specifications shall include:

1. Recommended species
2. Seeding or vegetative rates and dates
3. Establishment procedures
4. Other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand.

Record specifications on approved specifications sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

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

Maintenance practices and activities will not disturb cover during the primary nesting period (March 1 – July 15) for grassland species. Exceptions for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community can be made, refer to Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standard 645 Guidance, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management for more information. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds.

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

To benefit native pollinators and insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, perform spraying or other control of weedy species on a “spot treatment” basis to protect forbs and legumes.

REFERENCES

- Florida NRCS Conservation Practice Standards
 Critical Area Planting, Code 342
 Field Border, Code 386
 Filter Strip, Code 393
 Nutrient Management, Code 590
 Pest Management, Code 595
 Prescribed Burning, Code 338
 Riparian Forest Buffer, Code 392
 Tree/Shrub Establishment, Code 612
 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 645
 Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Code 644
- General Manual, Part 401
 National Planning Procedures Handbook
 NRCS Florida Technical Notes
 NRCS, Florida Native Seed Production Manual
<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/pubs/flpmcufilsdprod.pdf>
 NRCS National Biology Manual
 Range Management for Important Native Grasses of Florida
 Univ. Florida/IFAS Florida Forage Handbook
http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_BOOK_Florida_Forage_Handbook
 Florida Exotic Plant Council
<http://www.fleppc.org/list/list.htm>
 NRCS. 1979. Management for wildlife: a supplement to wildlife standards and specifications for Florida, Gainesville, FL. 89pp.