

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**CRITICAL AREA PLANTING**

(Ac.)

**CODE 342**

**DEFINITION**

Establishing permanent vegetation on sites that have or are expected to have high erosion rates, and on sites that have physical, chemical or biological conditions that prevent the establishment of vegetation with normal practices.

**PURPOSE**

- Stabilize areas with existing or expected high rates of soil erosion by water.
- Restore disturbed or degraded sites that cannot be stabilized through normal methods.

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On areas with existing or expected high rates of erosion or degraded sites that usually cannot be stabilized by ordinary conservation treatment and/or management, and if left untreated, could be severely damaged by erosion or sedimentation or could cause significant off-site damage.

**CRITERIA**

**General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes**

Species selected for seeding or planting shall be suited to current site conditions and intended uses. Selected species will have the capacity to achieve adequate density and vigor within an appropriate time frame to stabilize the site sufficiently to permit suited uses with ordinary management activities.

Species, rates of seeding or planting, minimum quality of planting stock, such as pure live seed (PLS) or stem caliper, and method of establishment shall be specified before application. Only viable, high quality seed or planting stock will be used.

Site preparation and seeding or planting shall be done at a time and in a manner that best ensures survival and growth of the selected species. What constitutes successful establishment, e.g. minimum percent ground/canopy cover, percent survival, stand density, etc. shall be specified before application.

Fertilization, mulching, or other facilitating practices for plant growth shall be timed and applied to accelerate establishment of selected species. If the recommended fertilizer rate exceeds the criteria in Conservation Practice Standard

(590) Nutrient Management, appropriate mitigating practices will be installed to reduce the risk of nutrient losses from the site.

### **Additional Criteria To Restore Disturbed or Degraded Sites**

If gullies or deep rills are present, they will be treated, if feasible, to allow equipment operation and ensure proper site and seedbed preparation. The method and extent of gully treatment shall be defined in site-specific plans and specifications.

Soil amendments will be added as necessary to ameliorate or eliminate physical or chemical conditions that inhibit plant establishment and growth.

Amendments, such as compost or manure to add organic matter and improve soil structure and water holding capacity;

agricultural limestone to increase the pH of acid soils; or elemental sulfur to lower the pH of calcareous soils shall be included in the site specification with amounts, timing, and method of application.

### **CONSIDERATIONS**

On some sites, it may be necessary to strip and stockpile topsoil. In such cases, chisel exposed compacted soil areas, apply fertilizer and lime, and then spread topsoil evenly over the treated area prior to seedbed preparation.

Native species or mixes that are adapted to the site and have multiple values should be considered.

Avoid species that may harbor pests. Species diversity should be considered to avoid loss of function due to species-specific pests.

Irrigation may be necessary for successful establishment. If irrigation is used, do not

use a rate that will cause runoff and erosion.

### **PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS**

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded and filed using the approved specification sheets or narrative statements in the conservation plan.

### **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Reseeding or replanting will be necessary if permanent vegetation has not obtained 50% ground cover in the second growing season after planting.

Site shall be managed and protected from disturbances such as grazing, fire, vehicle traffic, and pests as long as necessary to stabilize the site and successfully establish a permanent vegetative cover.

Critical area plantings should not be grazed until well established see Standard and Specifications, Use Exclusion (472). Once established, area may be grazed according to Standard and Specifications, Prescribed Grazing (528A).

Use of the area shall be managed as long as necessary to stabilize the site and achieve the intended purpose.

Control or exclude pests that will interfere with the timely establishment of vegetation.

Inspections, fertilization, and pest control may be needed to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life.