

**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 PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on all lands needing permanent vegetation. 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 climate conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of noxious, invasive species shall be avoided.

Grasses, forbs, legumes and woody plants shall be handled and planted in a manner that will enhance establishment and survival of all species.

Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate

to accomplish the planned purpose.

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.

Only viable, high quality and adapted seed or planting stock shall be used. Vegetative planting material (e.g. sprigs, rhizomes, bulbs, seedlings) shall be from a reliable supplier.

Use Conservation Tree / Shrub Suitability Groups, Section II-(iii)-I in the Field Office Technical Guide for recommendations on woody species.

Trees and shrubs will be established according to the TREE / SHRUB ESTABLISHMENT (612) and TREE / SHRUB SITE PREPARATION (490) conservation practice standards.

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.

Vegetative manipulation will be accomplished by mechanical, biological or chemical methods, by prescribed burning, or a combination of the four. If burning is used alone or in combination with the other methods, the PRESCRIBED BURNING (338) conservation practice must be included as a planned practice.

Soil tests for herbaceous species will be required to determine the fertilizer and soil amendments to be applied for establishment

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Service or download the standard from the electronic Field Office Technical Guide for Missouri.

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and stand maintenance.

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.

The selected herbaceous seed mixture will contain at least 60 percent perennial grasses based on pure live seed (PLS) rated excellent, good, or fair for erosion control in Table 1 of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification. No more than 20 percent of the desired stand will be species rated poor for erosion control.

All nutrients shall be applied following the NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT (590) practice standard and the requirements of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification.

Additional Criteria to Improve 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.

The selected herbaceous seed mixture will contain at least 60 percent perennial grasses based on PLS rated excellent, good, or fair for erosion control in Table 1 of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification. No more than 20 percent of the desired stand will be species rated poor for erosion control.

All nutrients shall be applied following the NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT (590) practice standard and the requirements of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification.

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 to Enhance Wildlife Habitat

Planting/Establishment

Grasses, forbs, woody plants, and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage plant diversity for wildlife. Refer to the UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT (645) practice standard for guidance on species selection and acceptable mixtures.

Nutrients and soil amendments will be applied when needed based on the quality, vigor, and production level desired. Nutrients will not be required for vegetation establishment on productive cropland sites with current soil test analysis and a history of nutrient and soil amendment applications when converting from crop production to wildlife habitat.

Select species, site preparation, establishment methods, and planting dates from Table 1 of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification. Select species to create an open structure that allows increased forb production and wildlife movement.

Seed mixtures and seeding rates for herbaceous plantings will be available in the current SeedRate program based on using a drill to plant the seed and achieve good seed to soil contact. Use SeedRate to adjust for planting methods and to identify suitable planting periods.

For woody species, use UPLAND WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT (645) for guidance. Select native species when possible.

Management/Maintenance

Methods used shall be designed and selected to protect the soil resource from erosion.

Maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover during the reproductive period for grassland wildlife species.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other undesirable, 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.

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.

The selected herbaceous seed mixture will contain at least 60 percent perennial grasses based on PLS rated excellent, good, or fair for erosion control in Table 1 of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification. No more than 20 percent of the desired stand will be species rated poor for erosion control.

All nutrients shall be applied following the NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT (590) practice standard and the criteria in the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification.

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 the Integrated Pest Management guidance of the University of Missouri Columbia for the target pest species.

The selected herbaceous seed mixture will contain at least 60 percent perennial grasses based on PLS rated excellent, good, or fair for erosion control in Table 1 of the VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification. No more than 20 percent of the desired stand will be species rated poor for erosion control.

All nutrients shall be applied following the NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT (590) practice standard and the requirements of the

VEGETATION ESTABLISHMENT, HERBACEOUS SEEDING (723) specification.

CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species. Consider a diverse mixture of grasses, forbs, legumes and woody species.

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 weeds.

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

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

Rotate management and maintenance activities (e.g. burn 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 when available. Consider trying to re-establish the native plant community for the site. Native forbs and legumes may benefit native pollinator populations.

If a native cover establishes (other than what was planted) 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. These shall include, but are not limited to, recommended species, seeding rates and dates, establishment procedures, and 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.

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.

Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species. Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning or mowing when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds. Noxious weeds will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.

Annual mowing of the conservation cover stand for general weed control is not recommended.

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals shall not compromise the intended purpose.

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.